

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1784—VOL. LXIX.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 10, 1897.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



BERTIE BURIED HER HEAD IN HER MOTHER'S LAP, AND SOBBED OUT HER TALE OF LOVE.

WAS SHE TO BLAME?

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"How pretty your dress is, Bertie! Was it designed to kill?"

Miss Vandeleur lifted a pair of velvety brown eyes to the questioner and smiled, showing all her pretty white teeth.

"Of course I want to do some execution, Hirst; but I always choose my dresses with a view to please myself, and at the same time enhance my few charms. I am quite of your opinion—the dress is very pretty."

She stood a little distance from him, as it were posing for his admiration, and she seemed fairer than ever he had thought her, in her dress of frosted-white tulle and shimmering silk, unrelieved by any colour save a cluster of

scarlet holly-berries and green leaves at her bosom.

He leaned a little towards her.

"You're a perfect Christmas fairy!" he said, and she blushed slightly under his inspection. The strains of "Dream Faces" came to them where they stood in the shadow of ferns and exotics, and the girl's tiny white-slippered feet kept time to the beautiful air.

"You are anxious to rejoin the dancers!" her companion questioned. "Shall we go now?"

"Not unless you wish it, Hirst," consulting her tablets. "This is your waltz, I see."

"Then I elect to remain here"—his grey eyes taking in every detail of her girlish freshness and prettiness; "it is cooler here, and one has a chance of talking to you. But let me take you to a seat. There is a jolly one at the far end of the place."

So saying he led her to a retired spot, and sat down by her in silence, as if waiting for her to speak.

Her bright prettiness charmed him as it had never before done. He knew it was the dear desire of his mother's heart to see Bertie Vandeleur his wife, not only because she was her father's heiress and the estates dovetailed, but because she was really attached to the girl; and he began to feel his happiness might lie in gratifying his mother's wish.

He had known Bertie as a child. Her family was good, and she would be a wealthy woman at her father's death, for Mr. Vandeleur had estates in Jamaica too. Even at this time he was absent directing some improvements there, so Mrs. Vandeleur and her daughter were spending their Christmas at the "Hall."

His thoughts held him silent so long that the girl asked,—

"What are you thinking? Oh, it was some treason—you look so very guilty," she laughed, softly, and glanced at him through her long dark lashes.

"One thought was Aunt Priscilla will have a miserable journey. Five miles is a long drive,

and I fancy she is very late. Her train was due an hour ago."

"Oh," Miss Vandeleur remarked, carelessly, "trains are always late on Christmas Eve. Miss Lomax should have timed her return earlier. For my part, I shall be quite content if she does not arrive until the midnight of Boxing Day."

Her words released him from the spell she had cast upon him.

"I wish, Bertie, you had a little more affection for poor old Prissy. She is the most honest, good-hearted of women."

"Just so," coolly; "especially where she has a prejudice. She is particularly honest, and, just then, witness the victim of her hate," laughingly stretching out her gloved hands. "I believe she credits me with all manner of wickedness, and then you expect me to esteem and—love her. Thanks, I can't fancy myself going into raptures over an iceberg."

He hardly noticed her latter words.

"I am getting anxious about her," he said, and Bertie laughed again.

"You are a model, nephew Hirst—a shining example to the present irreverent youngsters! Is every Lomax so immaculate?"

He looked at her quickly, but could discover no sneer upon her lips, and her voice had carried no hint of disdain in it. He saw only a coquettish face lit up by large dark eyes.

"She is very pretty," he thought. "Do I love her?"

Miss Vandeleur started.

"I heard the sound of wheels. I guess the estimable old lady has arrived at last. Pray, go down to meet her; tell her my rapture at the thought of seeing her again holds me a prisoner here," and, with her scoffing words following him, he ran down.

A carriage was at the door, and a lady thrust her head from the window; but Hirst Lomax could not see for the blinding snow, and only his aunt's voice led him to her.

"Are you all asleep or dead?" she demanded, irately. "Don't you know Priscilla Lomax, that none of you come to meet and welcome her? Hirst, are you there?"

The young man rapped out.

"I am here, aunt. You are very late."

"Late! Of course I am! I'll sue the company, upon my honour, as a Lomax! Come here, boy! Are you afraid of the weather? A precious trouble I am in! I've brought you a strange visitor."

He had moved forward, and he saw a figure huddled up in a corner, seemingly inert.

"Who is it, aunt?"

"Who is it?" she mimicked. "Don't stand asking me questions, but give me some help! The poor thing is more dead than alive! Dear! dear! she has fainted again! Lift her out, Hirst, and take her to my room, where those giddy girls daren't come. Be sharp, boy!" impatiently.

Two seconds later Hirst Lomax was carrying a slim figure into the hall, whilst the footmen looked on astonished.

Half way up the stairs he met Bertie, who had the run of the house.

"Who is she?" the young lady questioned, with a critical glance. "Some *protégée* of the good Miss Priscilla! Can I be of any help?"

And Miss Lomax, from the rear, said, tartly,—

"No; go back to your partners. We shall manage better without than with you!"

"Thanks, madam!" with the demurest of curtsies. "Vagrants are not much in my line!"

And she rustled away to the ballroom. Hirst laid his unconscious burden upon a couch; then stood looking helplessly on. Miss Priscilla clashed her bell, and her maid appeared.

She was too good a servant to show any surprise, but began to apply restoratives in a most methodical way, Miss Priscilla helping heartily.

After a long period of unconsciousness the stranger's heavy white lids slowly lifted, and from beneath the dark fringes looked a pair of eyes as blue as violets.

"Oh!"

It was a long-drawn, shuddering sigh; then the girl sat up and looked round.

"You are very kind!" she said, and sank again into semi-unconsciousness.

"You're not wanted!" the maiden lady said sharply to her nephew. "Go back to your dancing!"

And Hirst Lomax reluctantly obeyed her, haunted on his way by the stranger's eyes of blue, and her most exquisite face, shadowed in the masses of black hair.

Reaching the ballroom he found Miss Vandeleur just released by her partner, and consulting his programme found he was to dance the next with her.

He gained her side, and she gave a swift glance into his dark, good-looking face.

"You are not disposed to dance," she said. "Sit here and talk to me."

That was the last thing he wished, but her imperious manner commanded obedience; so he sat down beside her.

With a smile, as cold as it was careless, she asked,—

"And who is the fair vagrant?"

"Her name is unknown to me at present," frigidly; "but she is a lady in appearance, and I believe by birth."

"Indeed! Ladies are not usually found roaming country roads in the dead of a snowy night," smiling still; "but I accept your belief as truth. She was fortunate to meet with a good Samaritan, although I must confess Miss Priscilla never struck me in that light before."

"Perhaps not; you have not attempted to learn her intrinsic worth. If a rough diamond she is a very real one."

A shadow flitted over Miss Vandeleur's face; but she remarked, equably,—

"I am sorry to learn I have done her an injustice. Is it too late to retrieve my fault?"

And those soft brown eyes were lifted once more to his; but now their momentary power was gone.

"Tell me," leaning forward, "is the stranger pretty? My cursory glance failed to satisfy me on that point."

"She is very lovely, or will be when the marks of fatigue have left her," gravely; "and her eyes are blue as—as violets; her hair black as night."

"That is an Irish mixture. Ah! here is Captain Gray coming to claim me. Adieu, now and."

Directly afterwards he saw her in the captain's arms, dancing as if the waltz were the only thing worth living for—dancing with a graceful abandon peculiar to herself.

Many eyes followed her as she moved through the mazes of men and girls, never looking flushed or excited—only enjoying the moment in a calm manner natural to her.

More than one man present called her pretty; said to himself she was desirable as a wife; but Hirst Lomax turned from her almost in disgust.

"She is a heartless coquette, and it is well my eyes have been opened in time."

The heartless coquette was meanwhile giving a graphic account of the fair stranger. Captain Gray had seen the arrival, and now declared his belief that Hirst was "smitten" with her.

"No doubt her romantic entrance has something to do with it."

"Possibly," said Miss Vandeleur; "but he tells me she is distinctly lovely, with blue eyes and black hair—a lady not only in appearance, but by birth."

"Has she already told him that!" laughing sarcastically.

"Oh, no; that is a happy inspiration he has had. Granted a woman is pretty and slender, with white hands and pathetic eyes, a man usually dubs her a lady, and it is not until she speaks that he is aware of his blunder."

"There are exceptions to the rule, Miss Vandeleur," with an ardent glance. "I hope you credit me with superior discernment," and almost insensibly he held her closer.

She blushed slightly; but answered with a laugh,—

"I have a very poor opinion of your sex in general. I'm afraid I can't make an exception of

you; believe me, it would be very bad for you, I think I am tired; let us rest a little while."

Quite willing to draw her away from the giddy throng he found a seat in an alcove, upon which Miss Vandeleur sank, whilst the Captain stood beside her. He bent over her.

"Tell me why you esteem my unfortunate sex so lightly?"

"I have so many reasons for doing so that it would take hours to enumerate them, and to support each reason I could bring forward a dozen arguments—all purely logical."

"I have not the slightest doubt as to your ability to accomplish anything, and I fully believe you are as merciless as you are—pardon me—beautiful," with a sudden lowering of his voice.

Bertie lifted arch eyes to him.

"Tell me why so many men flatter me, and devote themselves to me! Now, remember you are on your honour, and must speak nothing but truth."

"You are easily answered, Miss Vandeleur. He who is insensible to your charms is unfit for any society but his own."

The girl smiled brightly.

"That is just the sort of answer I expected. But do you think, Captain Grey, all this admiration is disinterested? Has my fortune nothing to do with it?"

He winced slightly, and the smiling brown eyes seemed not to see the momentary embarrassment were keenly alive to it.

"Some few may be base enough to consider that; but there are others who would be glad to know that you had fallen into sudden poverty that so they might prove their loyalty."

He spoke impressively; but Miss Vandeleur was in no way touched or confused.

"I am not inclined to court poverty to oblige these loyal gentlemen. I've a conviction I shouldn't care for love in a cottage, and a russet gown would be unbecoming to me."

"Miss Vandeleur would be beautiful in any dress. I wish with all my heart you had not been born to riches. No man of honour likes to expose himself to the accusation of being a fortune-hunter."

"No man really loving a woman would allow such a thought to come between them. A guilty conscience is its own accuser."

The gallant Captain was puzzled; her face was so smiling and innocent of any intention to hurt, and yet her words carried a great sting with them.

He wondered if she could by chance have learned the deplorable emptiness of his exchequer, and the anxiety of his creditors to obtain but a fraction of their dues, never daring to hope for the whole.

None knew so well as he how necessary it was he should marry a woman with money; birth and beauty he would not insist upon, but a fortune—well, he could not dispense with that.

Whilst he thought thus, Bertie's soft eyes were fixed upon him, reading his secret, yet never revealing their knowledge, and when, with a start, he came back to the present he saw nothing in her to increase his uneasy thoughts, but something that seemed to bid them to flight.

He did not love her, he had put by love long ago, when he said good-bye for ever to a pretty girl, far below him in rank, whose life he had spoiled and whose memory would always haunt him. Yet not loving Bertie he admired her, and would have felt a certain pride in calling her wife.

Doubtless he would waste her fortune; but in other respects he would be a kind husband, not being a vicious, but merely a weak spendthrift. So now he bent over the girl, conscious that Hirst Lomax was watching, and glorying rather that his wealthy rival (as he pleased to call him) had received few signs of favour that night from Miss Vandeleur.

He laid himself out to please, taxed his memory for flattering speeches and lively stories, and when Bertie went away with her next partner was rewarded by her with the few words,—

"Thanks, Captain Grey, you are very amusing!"

He would have preferred some other speech—he would have been glad to see a shade of regret on her face as she was led from him; but he tried to possess his "soul with patience," and presently might have been seen devoting himself to the next most desirable girl.

She was very plain, very stupid; but she possessed twenty thousand pounds in her own right.

Bertie was rather glad when the guests began to leave; she felt unusually tired, and was possessed with a vague sense of dissatisfaction very unusual to her, and it was with real pleasure that she welcomed the moment in which she might go to her room.

Hirst wished her a somewhat cold good-night. The coldness she ignored with her customary graceful indifference, and in her voice there was not the slightest shadow of change.

Her room adjoined her mother's and she considerably surprised Mrs. Vandeleur by entering in a pale pink peignoir and her hair unbound. She sat down in a low chair which she drew up to the fire, then with her feet crossed upon the fender, she said,—

"I felt like talking, so I sent Theresa away. Are you very tired, mother?"

"Not too tired to have you here, dear. I am rather glad that you have come; I had a question to ask you."

She passed her hand caressingly over her daughter's pretty dark hair.

"Did Hirst say anything to you to-night?" I fancied by his manner after supper that he had spoken, and your answer had not been favourable. He seemed to regard you with displeasure. Was it so?"

"As to the displeasure I think I might say yes; but he said nothing to me beyond the merest courtesies. I believe, mother, you may dismiss all idea of his desiring me for his wife," lightly, and meeting the eldest lady's glance with pretty unconcern. "Once this evening he fancied I was something to him. I saw it on his face, and but for the stranger's most inopportune appearance would have done me the honour you and Mrs. Lomax wish."

"My dear, the girl's appearance certainly could have nothing to do with the change in his manner. I don't believe in love at first sight, and Hirst's mind is too well-regulated to allow him to form any foolish attachment."

"I think the mind has very little to do with it. If you look back you will find the cleverest men almost invariably have chosen fools for their wives; some have married women one could not receive. I don't see why Hirst Lomax should prove wiser than his fellow-men."

"I am disappointed, my dear. It has been my dearest wish to see you his wife. I shall not give up hope yet. You see, in the event of your marriage with him I should not lose you."

"Just so," quietly, "but you would not angle for a husband for me! I am not so very old yet that you should be so anxious to make me wear the matrimonial yoke—twenty-one is comparatively juvenile. Am I such a source of trouble you long to be free of me?"

"You know the contrary, but the mere fact that you are an heiress exposes you to many dangers."

"My dear mother," lightly, "of that I am perfectly aware, and I credit no man with disinterested motives who pretends in the least to my favour. Are you satisfied?" smiling then.

"No. I cannot be blind to Captain Grey's attentions, and he is a notorious spendthrift."

"I am perfectly aware of that. You need not fear the Captain, and I am not susceptible. Besides which I know a story of his past; Myra Dinwiddie told it me. I suppose most people would not blame him much; but you shall judge for yourself if his conduct calls for rebuke. He was staying at a little town in Essex—Myra was visiting there at the same time—and by some means he became acquainted with a very pretty girl, a milliner, the daughter of a compositor. He took every opportunity to waylay her, walk with her, pay her those attentions most women

prize; through him the girl angered her parents, and they compelled her to resign her situation and sent her to London, where she got employment in a West-end firm. Frank Grey followed her, she having acquainted him by letter of her place of residence. But he did not offer her marriage; he merely bade her good-bye for all time, saying that he was not in a position to make her his wife; and then he left her to her broken heart, her ill-requited faith. She returned to her friends, and Myra heard only yesterday that she is dying of his desertion; and people say he loved her!" scornfully.

"My dear, the story may be exaggerated; doubtless Captain Grey is no worse than other idle young men; and probably the girl was flighty. I don't see how she should get an introduction to him; but, of course, he is an undesirable husband for you." Miss Vandeleur smiled. "This is hardly like you," she said, and blushing a little, her mother continued, "If you made an unsuitable engagement in your father's absence, I think he would not forgive my lack of watchfulness. You are the very apple of his eye, to use a homely saying."

"That is gratifying to one's vanity. But you must not be anxious about me. I am as keenly alive to the advantages of a good match as the most worldly mother could wish."

She rose and stood with one elbow on the mantel, and the pink sleeve falling back displayed the whiteness of her pretty arm. Mrs. Vandeleur looked at her in a little surprise.

"You are not like most girls, Bertie. At your age I was romantic and ready to trust all who professed friendship for me. If there is any defect in your character, it is want of girlish faith and thoughtlessness."

Bertie moved a little so as to command a view of herself in an opposite pier-glass.

"Yet my face is not hard, and my eyes look gentle enough," she said, "I believe I deceive most people."

Then with characteristic abruptness she turned to another subject.

"I wonder who this *protégée* of Miss Priscilla may be! From the momentary glimpses I had of her face I should say Hirst's description of her is a true one. I charitably volunteered to help her benefactress, but she declined my assistance with her usual graceful courtesy. I positively believe she hates me."

"I am afraid she does not regard you too favourably; she may even, if it pleases her, prejudice Hirst against you. It is a pity matters were not settled before she returned; she is a woman who will have her own will, cost whatever it may. She would not be careful to spare one's feelings."

"I believe she is incapable of a dishonest action or an untruthful word," Bertie said; "she is at least an open foe, an encounter with her is rather exhilarating than not. To-morrow I shall defy her by paying a visit to this nameless one. I am decidedly curious."

She sighed a little as she spoke, and looked graver than was her habit.

"I think I'll leave you in peace now, dear; you look so very tired."

She moved forward, and, stooping, kissed her mother upon the cheek.

"Good-night; may your dreams be pleasant."

Then the slim young figure disappeared through the doorway, and was seen no more that night.

In the morning the guests assembled at the breakfast-table, and there ensued a prolonged chorus of good wishes; then each fell to untying the packages and unsealing the letters lying in little heaps beside his or her plate.

Bertie's pile was a large one, so noticeably so that the gentleman next her said, laughingly, she had "Benjamin's share."

There were exclamations of admiration as she produced a diamond cross, the gift of her father; a gold necklace with pendants, from her mother, with sundry other presents from friends and admirers. One of the prettiest was a minute copy of "Des Marchen," beautifully illuminated.

With a sudden inspiration she lifted her eyes,

and met those of Captain Grey. He looked confused, but she was perfectly calm as she put it down a little apart from her other gifts, and turned to address her left-hand neighbour.

She was disappointed, but she gave no sign of this—amongst all her gifts there was not even a card from Hirst, and she remembered this was the first time he had omitted this courtesy since they had known each other. Perhaps he thought of this, too, and he wondered was she vexed, and looking into her smiling face, said that it answered no.

Breakfast ended, she swept her packages together, leaving none behind but the little "Des Marchen."

Captain Grey followed her to the door with it.

"You have left this," he said, handing it to her, in very obvious embarrassment.

She smiled.

"It is returned with thanks; the acquaintance between us is too slight for me to accept the merest trifle from you."

He still held the drawing to her, and now stammered,—

"But Miss Vandeleur, the season does away in a measure with formality; and if I am but an acquaintance now, I hope one day to be a very dear friend. Take it. The face reminded me of you; the eyes are precisely yours."

He seemed so much in earnest, so hurt by her refusal, that but for the recollection of "the little milliner who lay dying of his desertion" she would have been moved to relenting. As it was, she said, a trifle coldly,—

"My 'no' is always decided. I am sorry you should have compelled me to act in such a seemingly ungracious manner."

Then, with directness, which was robbed of any disagreeable element by the pretty glance which accompanied it,—

"Is there no one who deserves your remembrance more than myself, no one who would be glad of it?"

She saw his face grow a shade paler, and without a word he turned and left her. She looked after his retreating figure with a strange, incomprehensible glance, then she laughed lowly.

"That shot told," she said to herself. "Let him go back to his real love; my fortune is not for him."

Then she went to her room and made a becoming toilet, afterwards going to Miss Priscilla's room. That lady was just issuing from it. She glanced keenly at the pretty dark face upturned to hers.

"Well," she said, sharply, "what is it you want?"

"To see the patient," calmly; "I am really interested in her. May I go in, Miss Priscilla?"

Hardly liking to refuse admission, the elder lady answered,—

"I've no objection to that if you can keep your tongue from rattling on, and questioning about matters that don't concern you. I shall be absent only ten minutes, so you had best use your opportunity while you can."

"Thank you," with a slight bow and she tapped for admittance.

A voice said "Come in;" and entering Bertie found herself face to face with Miss Priscilla's *protégée*.

"Good-morning. I hope you are better," she said, mentally taking her *vis à-vis* measure.

"Thank you, yes; but I am very weak, and Miss Lomax recommends entire rest and quiet."

"She is an excellent nurse," concisely. "You are wondering who I am, and why I am here? I am Bertie Vandeleur, near neighbour to Miss Lomax, and I have come to wish you a merry Christmas, and get acquainted with you."

She sat down, and the stranger's blue eyes followed all her movements.

She was looking particularly pretty in a seal-skin peignoir, a brown hat and feathers, brown boa and muff.

"Why do you watch me so intently?"

"I was thinking how pretty you are," in a soft refined voice, that yet had a dialectic tinge with it.

"Are you Scotch?" Miss Vandeleur asked.

loosening her boa. "You have a faint, but very taking" burr."

"My father was a clergyman in the north of England, but we never crossed the border.

"Is he dead? You said *was*, and your dress is black," her own tones grown gentler.

"Yes, I am an orphan and quite friendless. I have told Miss Lomax my story."

"Which means I am to ask no more questions; pray don't deny the accusation. I really don't mind, and I'll stifle my curiosity save on one point. Will you tell me your name?"

"Certainly; it is Margaret Ashwin," and as she turned her face full upon her questioner Bertie realized in a flash how lovely she was.

"You could well afford to pronounce me pretty," she said; "you have the face of an angel!"

She rose and shook out her skirts, laughing softly at Margaret's momentary embarrassment.

"I must leave you now, the church bells are going and I hate to be late, it creates such a disturbance, so for the present good-bye. Miss Priscilla will more than supply my loss." She reached the door, then looking over her shoulder, said, "If you want lighter reading than Miss Priscilla's library affords, you may draw on mine. I leave the Hall in two days, and shall be happy to send them to you."

On the stairs Hirst overtook her.

"I am afraid you are a little late, Bertie; did your toilet engross all your time since breakfast until now?"

She made a scornful gesture.

"No; I've been to see Margaret Ashwin. You were right, Hirst; she is very beautiful, and there is a pathetic, appealing look in her eyes. I expect all you men will be enraptured in a few days. 'Beauty in distress' and all that sort of thing. I am quite content it should be so. I don't blame you for the folly natural to you, only I do request you won't persistently sound her praises to me—we shall not be friends."

"You have formed an unreasoning and violent prejudice against her," he said, with annoyance.

"That is possible; but at present I am only conscious of a certain antagonism between our natures—we shan't assimilate; and if she stays here long the Hall will be spoiled for me," very frankly.

"Are you jealous of her physical advantages? Your lot surely compensates for those!" coldly.

Bertie smiled in a superior way.

"I am not jealous, as you surely ought to know. Of what use are a lovely figure and perfect face in these degenerate days? Men are not taken with them provided they are not accompanied by a fortune. What does it matter to me that Miss Ashwin is the taller by three inches? I am the richer, and I shall be courted for my money, with which nasty little shot at his sex she preceded him into the church and took her seat quietly.

When the Christmas Hymn, the old familiar "Adeste Fideles," was sung, he looked curiously at her, and could scarcely believe that the girl beside him, who sang as if her very soul revelled in music, whose eyes were so rapt an expression, was the same who a few minutes ago calmly expounded worldly sentiments, and dealt in covert gibes and sneers.

He was drawn again towards her; he had long believed one day she would be his wife, and the habit of many years clung about him yet, so that he felt and exhibited a certain air of proprietorship as he bent over her, and it was not until far into the sermon that the pleasant reverie into which he had fallen was broken.

This was done by Bertie herself, who leaning towards him whispered,—

"Do you think he will ever finish? I'm so hungry!"

He could not help smiling down into her brown eyes; but when this remark was followed by one bordering on levity, he frowned slightly.

Apparently his displeasure did not have the desired effect; the girl only looked down with mock demureness, and shrugged her shoulders. The long, dark lashes lay upon her cheeks that were a little flushed.

Hirst noted the pretty droop of the lips, the

soft curves of chin and throat, and his displeasure passed.

Perhaps Miss Vandeleur knew the power of that half childlike look, perhaps she was not so unconscious of his scrutiny as she appeared.

Presently she glanced up at him and smiled in her most gracious manner, and so peace was made.

When they left the church the sun was shining brightly, making the whole earth one glittering field of white; the air was keen, the snow trodden hard so that walking was pleasant.

"Bertie," the young man said, after a pause in their light chat; "you're very gracious now; I wonder why you need assume those little worldly airs, and flout a fellow so terribly as you do sometimes. You're a deal nicer in this mood. Promise to remain in it for the rest of the day!"

"My friend," Miss Vandeleur replied, laughing; "I'm nothing if not capricious; that is my forte."

CHAPTER II.

It was the evening of Boxing Day, and Bertie Vandeleur stood in the library, one foot resting on the fender, her eyes bright and her cheeks flushed. Perhaps she guessed how well she looked in white, for again her dress was colourless; it was of lace, and she wore antique ornaments of pearl. Her hair was dressed very much in the style of a Greek water-girl's, and three strings of pearls shone in its dusky masses.

She was fair enough to satisfy a more rigorous judge of female beauty than Hirst Lomax, and there was a gracious gravity in her expression that pleased the young man as he entered.

"What are you doing here, Bertie? It is unlike you to court solitude!" and he crossed to her side.

"Oh, I thought I'd get a little quiet before dinner—there will be none after. I've been reading"—she held up Tennyson for his inspection—"and I've just finished 'Maud.'"

"A very lively poem to read on a festive day," he answered, taking the book from her, and turning the leaves slowly and thoughtfully.

He had come to her with a purpose; half-an-hour ago his mother had said, "When will you give me my daughter, Hirst?" and he, being used to the idea of marrying Bertie, and not conscious of caring for any other woman so well, had mentally decided to settle his fate that night.

The girl saw the unusual thoughtfulness of his manner, and asked,—

"What is it, Hirst? You look as if you are on the eve of a desperate action. May I know the cause of this ultra-gravity?"

He laid aside the book, and took her hands.

"Yes, Bertie, you may. I have come to ask you a question—will you marry me?"

"No, I won't."

Her answer was so emphatic, so distinctly opposite to that which he had expected, that he was staggered. At first he could find nothing to say, but when she attempted to free her hands his words came fast and excitedly,—

"You can't mean that—we have always been accustomed to the idea of our marriage; our people have always wished it, and you have never seemed to dislike me. Mr. Vandeleur will be disappointed."

She broke in with utmost coolness,—

"That is not my fault. Thank you for the honour you have done me, but I know my own value."

"You don't mean you fancy I want your fortune?" with hot indignation, his eyes flashing angrily.

"I'm not quite so unjust. When I said I know my own value I meant no man shall take me on tolerance. You have done yourself and me a wrong—it remains for us to forget it."

"But, Bertie," moved, perhaps, to greater warmth because of her resistance, "give me a chance. I dare say I said what I had to say very clumsily. You must remember I am a novice at this sort of thing"—smiling faintly—"but I did not mean to imply that you were so little to me

that my wooing need be but careless. I'm not going to say I am moved to rapture when you are near—somehow I can't believe in love as the novelists describe it—but I've a very honest affection for you, and I believe we should be a happier couple than many amongst our acquaintances."

"You hold out very great inducements to me," she said, scoffingly. "Shall I exchange a certain present for a doubtful future, and for a man who in wooing me declares he does not love me? Ah! thank you, thank you, I am honoured too far," and she made him a mocking obeisance.

He began to grow angry, and he bit his nether lip fiercely to keep down the passionate words.

Bertie stood with flushed face, not attempting to help him, and finally he was compelled to break the silence.

"I did not think you prized sentiment. You have invariably voted it a bore when it has been spoken of."

"So it is in the abstract, but every woman likes her future lord to profess a sentimental regard for her, even though she knows he lies."

Hirst broke in fiercely,—

"Do you want me to play the humping?"

"No, there are so many ready to take that part that I should advise you to adhere to your rôle of honesty—it's unique and interesting—"

And there he stopped her with a quick gesture and a fiery torrent of words,—

"I don't want a dissertation on honesty, but I do insist upon being treated as a man, and not one of those who pretend to the name, and who meet with so much kindness from you. If I don't love you in the theatrical way you desire I have always esteemed and been fond of you, and if this does not content you, why let us go back to the old relationship—you on your part sure I did you the greatest honour in my power; I on mine satisfied you acted wisely. But, for Heaven's sake, keep your gibes for a more patient man. I for one shall not receive them tamely. I am not of the kiss-for-a-blow party, and may easily be goaded into forgetfulness of your sex, and to say what, in a calmer mood, I should be ashamed to remember. I can be very hard."

"Do you tell me that thinking to change my decision? Really the method you use to win a woman is a trifle too suggestive of the way in which the Conqueror won his wife. To all your flattering proposals I say no. Pray consider the subject closed."

"With pleasure," bitterly. "I at least credited you with very real womanliness and courtesy."

"Pray disabuse your mind of such chimeras," plucking the flowers at her bosom apart leaf by leaf, and strewing them at her feet; "try to accept me as I am—a logical and worldly girl, such as only the nineteenth century can produce. At least you must acquit me of any attempt to bring about this *dénouement*!"

"I shall do you justice. But tell me, Bertie, is this decision final? Do you hold out no hope?"

"Do you wish to be certain of your reprieve?" mockingly; then with sudden, fierce earnestness, "yes, it is final. Now, hear why. Because our marriage would be 'convenient'; because 'our people' wish it you have asked me to cast in lots with you; but you never really desired it. Do you think I will be thrust upon you, whether you will or no? Do you think I will unite myself to a man whose heart has yet to be awakened, who, when too late, may learn the lesson of love, and hate me for my consent to an old entreaty? I tell you no! Take that for my answer, and leave me."

The force, the fire with which she had spoken, the new light in her eyes surprised him. She did not seem to see this, but hurried on,—

"You have insulted me grossly; I would not easily forgive you but for the recollection of old days, when neither of us dreamed what a prosaic ending our friendship would have, remember that I am willing to forget, and be your friend—nothing more."

"But, Bertie," moved to keen admiration, "if my feelings towards you undergo a change, if I find that you are dearer to me than any other

woman, will you let me speak then—will you listen?"

She stood silent a moment; then answered,—
"Yes, you may speak, but I promise nothing. I may hear, and be sorry; I may hear, and be moved—who knows! Hearts are strange things!"

"If I have hurt your womanly pride and dignity, I beg your forgiveness; if I have transgressed any rule of courtesy in my conduct towards you I can only say I am sorry, and shall be glad to atone for my transgression in any way you demand—only let us be friends, Bertie."

"With all my heart," laughing softly. "Aren't you glad our interview has had so sensible an ending?"

In a state of confusion he said,—

"I—I am relieved. I am fond of my bachelor freedom."

"One day you will be equally 'fond' of some woman; then you will be glad you did not marry the girl you were pleased to call the Christmas Fairy. Now, if you please, go. Stay, I have spoiled my flowers. Will you beg some more of Bell, and bring them here to me?"

He went out to do her bidding, and she watched him with a curious look in her eyes. Then she sighed softly and sat down, resting her chin in her hollowed palms.

"How queer everything is," she said.

At dinner Miss Priscilla asked,—

"Why have you not visited Miss Ashwin to-day?"

And Bertie with the demurest of expressions, answered,—

"Really, Miss Lomax, that seems an unnecessary question. I am so constantly reminded that I am an intruder that there is small wonder I avoid your apartments."

Miss Priscilla made no retort. She knew the girl's words were too true to admit a denial. She sat discussing her soup in a thoughtful mood; then suddenly in a low tone,—

"I don't like you, Bertie, and you know it. Let that go. But young people naturally crave for companions of their own age; so if you choose to associate with Miss Ashwin you shall not complain of inhospitable treatment."

"Thank you. I'll give the matter my careful consideration"—so coolly that Miss Priscilla's pale face grew red. "What do you propose doing with the distressed damsel?"

"I will tell you to-morrow if you will form one of the party in the library. Rest assured she shall want for nothing whilst Priscilla Lomax lives; and I think you know my word is my bond," sternly.

"I do; I also know you are a very honest woman in all things. Now, I don't pretend to honesty myself; but I admire it in others;" then she leaned back and broke into a perfect ripple of laughter at Miss Priscilla's look of horrified surprise.

Captain Grey addressed her from the opposite side of the table.

"What is the joke, Miss Vandeleur? May I share it?"

The maiden lady looked "daggers" as the girl answered,—

"I am afraid not; but I will prefer your request to Miss Lomax if you really wish it."

"Pray do. I am devoured by curiosity!" And to Bertie's infinite glee that lady snapped,—

"I wish you joy of your state," and for the remainder of the evening ignored their very existence.

The following morning Hirst, his mother, and aunt, Mrs. Vandeleur and Margaret Ashwin sat waiting Bertie's coming. An ominous frown was on Miss Priscilla's brow at the girl's remembrance.

"I told her eleven precisely, and it is now half-past," referring to the watch she had placed before her on the table. "I shall wait five minutes longer, then shall proceed without her. Madam," to Mrs. Vandeleur, "it is a pity you did not teach your daughter the value of time. Hirst, step into the garden. Perhaps you will find her there."

The young man rose reluctantly. He had been feasting his eyes with Margaret's rare loveliness, and was disinclined to lose one thrill of pleasure it gave him.

She was looking very beautiful and very pathetic. The dressing-gown, which was one of her lady friends, being rose-colour, gave just the necessary tinge to her otherwise pale face. Her large dark eyes, shadowed by black lashes, were soft and appealing—altogether she made so dainty a picture that Mrs. Lomax felt uneasy.

Before Hirst could leave the room Bertie entered, and quietly divesting herself of hat, cape, and gloves sat down, without apologising for her late appearance. Miss Priscilla, however, did not attempt to hide her displeasure.

"Do you understand," she asked, icily, "that you have tacitly insulted Miss Ashwin and myself. I'm inclined to think you don't, as you attempt no apology."

The most provoking of smiles played about Miss Vandeleur's lips, and lit up her great brown eyes.

"My dear Miss Lomax, it was surely unnecessary to wait for me, and I did not suppose you would so far depart from your rules as to do so;" and she met Hirst's angry look with superlative calmness.

The maiden lady treated her remark this time with silent contempt; and when each one felt sufficiently uncomfortable she broached the subject.

Miss Ashwin has confided her story to me, and asked me to relate it to you. Willing to save her any pain resulting from so sad a recital I have promised to do so. That she is a lady I think you are all convinced. Her father was the vicar of Terresdale, a small place in Northumberland; her mother has been dead many years; her father died six months ago."

Bertie glanced at the girl carelessly; then resumed her gentle tattoo upon the table.

"With the exception of her mother's sister, who had married well, she was left alone in the world, twenty pounds being her whole fortune. Relying on this aunt's generosity until she could find work she instantly started for Doncaster, but met with so frigid, so heartless a reception that she left the house the next day, and hired a room in a cheap part of the town. Here she set to work to obtain a situation, but failed. Her education did not fit her for a governess; there was nothing open to her but such places as mothers' helps or companions are called upon to fill."

"She answered advertisement after advertisement, but all to no purpose; and at last, when her little money was almost gone, she saw one that promised well; it was at Mrs. Lawes's, at Yelverton, and the lady requested all applicants to apply personally. Miss Ashwin had not sufficient cash left to pay her train fare, and no ornaments of which she could dispose, and so she determined to walk the distance. But she lost her way, and at last fell amongst the snow from sheer fatigue. But for my passing that night would have been her last on earth. Now, I ask you not only for your compassion, but your friendship for this poor lonely child. I ask nothing more; all other things I am prepared to give myself."

"This is very romantic," Bertie whispered. "There remains nothing for Miss Ashwin to do now but marry the Fairy Prince."

Hirst Lomax frowned. After all it was well Bertie had refused him—so he thought.

"I have telegraphed to Doncaster, and learned that Miss Ashwin's friends have sailed for Canada, so that she is virtually without a relative. Now, I propose she should not apply to Mrs. Lawes, but remain with me as my companion. I am getting too old now for my correspondences. She would be a great help to me, but of course, at last, I defer to you, as mistress of the Hall. What do you say to my proposal?"

"That it sounds very sensible," Mrs. Lomax answered, hurriedly; "and in pleasing yourself, Priscilla, you will me. I hope, Miss Ashwin, you will find your new life and your new home pleasant."

"Thank you, madam; you are too kind!" Margaret said, with a tremor in her low voice that touched the lady.

"Mrs. Vandeleur, I shall be glad if you will allow an intimacy between these two girls. Remember, Margaret, is to be treated as one of ourselves. May I rely upon you and Bertie?"

Mrs. Vandeleur hesitated a moment.

"I shall be happy to receive Miss Ashwin; but Bertie must answer for herself—she is whimsical."

"Thanks, mother; I perfectly appreciate the compliment; and, Miss Priscilla, if you are not afraid of my corrupting influence, I am ready to promise eternal friendship, as girls are fond of doing. They invariably forget the promise; but 'sufficient to the day is the evil.'"

And the lady, not liking the tone of her reply, yet made no angry retort, being glad to win Bertie over, even on her own terms.

So it was decided Margaret should stay, and Miss Priscilla set to work to replenish her companion's wardrobe. In vain the girl protested she could not accept so much from her; her expostulations only made the lady more generous—more eager to have her own will.

One thing she did that was hardly fair; she had Margaret's black dresses modelled precisely after the style of Bertie's, much to that young lady's disgust.

The only articles of dress in which the girls differed were their hats—Bertie affected large and Margaret small ones. Bertie wore her hair in a bang; Margaret's was drawn back in waving masses from her low white forehead.

One day Miss Vandeleur sat alone in a snug room she called her studio—for she dabbled in art—when Margaret was announced. However brusque or scornful the former might be at Lomax Hall she was all courtesy and hospitality at home; and the companion found the change in her as pleasing as it was surprising.

She rose, laid aside her palette and brush, and shook hands with her visitor.

"Pray remove your wraps, Miss Ashwin; the room is warm. I am like exotics, and flourish only in a warm atmosphere. Let me place your chair nearer the fire. Ah! I see you like heat—that is a link between us," smiling, and showing her pretty white teeth.

"Miss Lomax has sent me with some prints—she said you wished to copy in water-colours—and she hopes you will not regard them as a loan but a gift!" producing a small packet and laying it on the table.

"Oh! you must thank her many times for me, and I will come up to the Hall myself to-morrow. Will you tell Miss Priscilla we have heard from my father, and that he hopes to be with us early in March. Mother is simply mad with delight."

She drew her own chair up to the fire and sat down opposite her visitor.

"Will you lunch with us? We shall be pleased if you will. Oh! I will not take no for an answer, and I'll send a messenger to Miss Lomax. Now," with her feet upon the fender, her hands clasped about her knees, which attitude was a favourite one with her, "tell me something about yourself. If we are to be friends we must indulge in little confidences. See, I will spread my life like a book before you. From babyhood I have been indulged and flattered, not for any good or beauty people saw in me, but because I am one of the greatest heiresses in England. I have had admirers and lovers (such as they were), and I have never had an unsatisfied wish; I have flirted rather more than most girls, and there isn't either man or maid I can call my friend. But I am content, more than content. There is my history in a few words; it is very uneventful. Did you spend all your days at Terresdale, Miss Ashwin? Didn't you find it dull?"

"Yes, to both questions. My childhood was painful, miserable. I had no playmates, and we received no visitors; my father could not enter into my moods, my fancies. I grew up into a neglected girlhood, filled with longings for a sight of the outer world. My heart grew bitter; I hated the narrow round in which I moved, the familiar faces of the peasants about me," and then the deep blue eyes flashed, and Margaret Ashwin's beauty took another aspect. "I hated the gloomy church and the dreary service. My one accomplishment is drawing. My father never allowed me to learn music, lest 'my heart should turn wholly to it.' Those were his words, and it sometimes I broke into song I was admonished that psalms were the proper expression of joy

and praise. Oh! when I think of those days, and the bitter results of that bitter training, I am inclined to revenge myself on all I meet for my sufferings and what they have made me!"

She had risen, and now paced the room agitatedly.

Bertie watched her a moment, kindling into admiration of the wonderful grace of her movements, the fire of her altered beauty.

Then she sprang up and caught Margaret's hands.

"Go on, I understand this mood, tell me all; I am ready to pity. Protest that your rage against your teachings, your fate, is just; it exalts you in my esteem, it draws me to you. Go on."

But Margaret, after one startled glance, dropped again into her ordinary quiet, the only difference being in her voice, which seemed laboured.

"No, I have said more than enough, Miss Vandeleur; more than I intended saying. Let my past rest; it is sufficient to say that my present is as a dream of paradise to it!"

Bertie made a wry grimace.

"Your last words tell me much. What must your past have been!"

And throughout Margaret's stay she was kindly, and almost affectionate.

But when her beautiful visitor had left she stood thoughtfully watching the slowly retreating figure, with its graceful, undulating movements.

"What a fool I was to allow myself to be beguiled! I distrust her, and I dislike her!"

After that day Margaret often went to the "Robinettes," as Mr. Vandeleur's house was called, and once she begged Bertie to address her by her Christian name.

Bertie hesitated a moment, then said,—

"I don't care for it, Margaret has a harsh sound;" but seeing a hurt look on her visitor's face, answered, "Well, let it be as you choose, Margaret."

And so they fell into the way of calling each other Bertie and Margaret, and Miss Lomax seemed pleased at the intimacy between them.

One day as they sat together Margaret said,—

"Miss Pricilla was speaking of you this morning, and she said Mr. Lomax asked you once to marry him. Didn't you love him that you said no?" and paused in some trepidation as to the nature of Bertie's answer.

It came very carelessly and smilingly.

"My dear child, with my fortune I might do better; and I have another reason for my rejection. Would you marry a man who asked you to do so from a sense of duty? who distinctly told you he 'did not love you, but you were not unpleasant to him?'—and probably a marriage with him would mean an ordinary, jog-trot, neutral-tinted existence. The honour done me seemed scarcely equal to the risk I should incur!"

She turned towards the window, then back again quickly.

"Come here, Margaret!" and Miss Ashwin moved to her side. "Do you see Hirst at the lodge-gates? He is coming here after an absence of three weeks. Imagine how flattered I am, and how anxious he must be to win my favour!"

Margaret blushed slightly, and Bertie seeing it asked abruptly,—

"How old are you?"

The question seemed so irrelevant that the other said, with a slow, amused smile,—

"Twenty-two!"

Miss Vandeleur touched her hand.

"With your beauty you haven't reached that age without having had a lover!"

"No; you are right!" a painful flush spreading over the white cheek and brow, "I had one once!"

"And his fate? May I know it?" in a pretty, interested way that did service sometimes for sympathy.

"I did not love him, so I treated him badly, and I lost him. Perhaps I am incapable of love," dreamily.

"That is a very ordinary failing. I myself plead guilty to it," laughing softly; "why, you look incredulous," and as Hirst now entered, the conversation changed suddenly.

Bertie met him in her most careless manner, for there was a growing coldness between them, dating from Margaret's admission to the Hall, and the heiress's keen eyes could not be blind to the fact that her lover was going over to the enemy, as she privately called Margaret; but she made no attempt to win him to admiration of herself, rather left him to be entertained by his aunt's companion.

She withdrew to a far end of the room, and soon appeared deeply interested in a book of etchings. She played a very inconspicuous part in the conversation, and when her visitors rose to go neither pressed them to stay or call again. She watched them go with a curious smile in her eyes, and a disdainful expression about her pretty mouth.

"How pleased Mrs. Lomax will be!" with somewhat bitter triumph; then sighed to herself, "somehow I don't like losing my cavaliers, and it won't be pleasant to meet Margaret Ashwin as the lady of the Hall."

Meanwhile the two, so unconscious of her thoughts, walked on side by side, Hirst intent on his companion's beauty. There was a faint flush on the high-bred, usually pale face, a more thoughtful expression in the lovely eyes, an air of weariness about every movement that appealed peculiarly to Hirst Lomax.

"You are ill or tired!" he said, gently, and the blue eyes were lifted a moment to his, as Margaret answered,—

"A little tired, Mr. Lomax, but not ill—some words of Miss Vandeleur's roused old, unhappy memories; events and people I have wished to forget come crowding back upon me—the recollection of the past is always painful," smiling faintly at his evident concern.

"Are you happy with us?" he questioned, abruptly; "is there anything you wish altered? Speak frankly."

"My life at the Hall is very peaceful," she said, slowly. "I have nothing to wish for but Bertie's friendship."

"But that you have?" surprisedly; "she always displays a great interest in you."

"Yes, I am aware of that, but I have only the semblance of friendship from her. She is too honest to mislead me as to the state of her affections. Perhaps if I am very patient I shall win her to me. I hope so, she is so clever, so good in her strange way, and so pretty. I think her eyes are the most wonderful I have ever seen."

"You praise generously," he said, almost angry she should commend Bertie, as it were, to his notice, "but unwisely. Your very partiality makes you blind to her faults; she is clever, but satirical; pretty because of her vivacity; when that goes she will be plain; her features are very irregular. Her eyes, I admit, are wonderful, but I prefer blue to brown," with a glance bordering on tenderness, "and tall girls to their shorter sisters."

A deep flush came over Margaret's throat and face, fading out quickly, and leaving her pale and a little tremulous.

The young man spoke again, this time very confusedly.

"Do you know, Miss Ashwin, I once asked Bertie to be my wife, and so recently as last Boxing Day! She refused, and now I am glad she did."

"Miss Lomax told me of the affair," quietly, "and she said, too, both your mother and Mrs. Vandeleur were very greatly disappointed. Your mother is much attached to Bertie, I believe."

"Yes, that is so; and Mrs. Vandeleur is anxious to keep her daughter near her. From childhood we have been destined for each other. Perhaps if this had not been the case I might have fallen a victim to her charms. But I am at a loss to think why we are wasting valuable time in discussing Bertie Vandeleur. I wanted to speak to you of yourself. I believe you are without relatives in England; have no trusty friend but my aunt. Is it not so?" and she bowed her head. "Well, I want you think of me as one anxious for your welfare and happiness—eager to advance your pleasure in all things. Will you remember this?"

Her face changed and whitened before him;

in her eyes there was a look he could not understand.

"Oh!" and her voice was full of tears, "you are too good, too generous to me, Mr. Lomax. How do you know I am not an adventurer? How do you know that my past was not shameful?"

He caught her hands and laughed blithely,—

"It is useless to attempt to sow suspicion in my mind. I know you for what you are—a pure and noble woman; and I have never desired to please any woman as I desire now to please you, Margaret."

Again she blushed, and this time sighed, whilst a look of pain darkened her blue eyes.

"It is good to believe in you—good to have known one who trusts me; in the past some who should have been tender to me were harsh and inconsistent! Oh! I have not been happy. If I had had some joy in my life I might have been a better woman," and through her voice there rang a sound of bitter pain.

"If you were better," Hirst said, smiling, "you would be an illustration of the poet's words, and prove too good 'for human nature's daily food.'"

But Margaret shook her head.

"You do not understand."

They had reached the drive leading up to the Hall, and Mrs. Lomax looking from the window, saw them coming slowly towards the house.

"Pricilla," she said, a trifle sharply, "is that wise! Will you allow your *protégée* to risk her happiness with my son? Do you see he looks down at her as he never did at Bertie!"

"I see all that, sister," with a pleased smile, "and shall be heartily glad if Hirst marries Margaret. She is very dear to me—is a lady; and as for fortune, Philippa, if that is what troubles you, I intend giving her a suitable dowry if she marries to please me. What objection can you raise to her? Is she not beautiful, gentle, industrious—good in everything where Bertie Vandeleur fails! I'm surprised at you, sister! Is your son's happiness nothing to you? For my own part, I did not credit Hirst with the nice discernment he has shown. Look at the girl—did you ever see a more perfect face and form, a more graceful carriage! She was born to be a countess!" enthusiastically.

"Why, then, Pricilla, don't rob the Earl of his bride," Mrs. Lomax said, almost angrily. "You always were unjust to Bertie—she is the dearest, prettiest, cleverest girl of our set."

"And the richest," interpolated the elderly maiden. "My dear Philippa, money is the root of all evil."

Mrs. Lomax stitched industriously at some fine white work, a cloud on her usually placid face, her lips compressed, and when the young people entered she did not look up or offer any remark.

Hirst looked keenly at her, and, as soon as they were left together, asked,—

"What's wrong, mother!" and leisurely lit a cigar as he spoke.

The lady looked up, a flush on her cheeks.

"What is wrong? Surely you ought to know. If you are amusing yourself with Margaret Ashwin, you should be ashamed of yourself; and if you are in earnest I think you must be mad."

"According to you, then, I am a knave or a fool. Well, really, it is makes no difference to you, I prefer being a fool. The fact is, mother, I am in earnest, and hope before long to give you a daughter."

"Margaret Ashwin!" irately. "What do you know of her antecedents? How can you tell her version of the story is true? Will you introduce a possible adventurer into the family—mix puddle-blood with ours that has been so unalloyed by any base strain? I wonder at you, Hirst!"

He flushed hotly.

"You are not taking a just view of it, mother. Aunt proved Miss Ashwin's story true, her family somewhat more than respectable. If she is willing to trust me I will make her my wife, hoping you will overcome your prejudice. And, please, remember that whatever comes I shall not marry Bertie; my eyes have been opened, and I know such a step would result in certain misery

to us both: I am sorry to disappoint you, but I cannot consent to spoil my own life and Margaret's—if, as I hope, she loves me—because of an old agreement to which I was never a party. I cannot think one's parents have any right to control or arrange one's marriage."

Mrs. Lomax was prudently silent, but her heart was sore against Margaret. It was true the girl's beauty, grace and gentleness had won upon her; but Bertie was her favourite, and she was unwilling to yield her place to any other.

But Hirst had chosen for himself. He knew what was best for his happiness, he was not a boy, having completed his twenty-sixth year, and Mrs. Lomax could only hope that something would occur to disengage him.

She insisted upon having Bertie more frequently at the Hall, continually sounded her praises, which was foolish, and Miss Priscilla laughed at her sister-in-law's want of diplomacy.

"Philippa will disgust Hirst with that Vandeleur girl, and hasten his declaration to Margaret."

The good lady was very true in her friendships, very implacable in her hates; quixotic and generous to a fault, but her nature was so distinctly opposed to Bertie's that there was little wonder the two did not agree.

It was in early March, and Bertie was dining at the Hall. Dinner was announced at five, and the whole party gathered about the table, and soon the ripple of gay voices and low laughter made echoes in the house.

The sounds of merriment reached a man crossing the large front lawn. He paused a moment a smile on his lips.

"That was Bertie," he said to himself, and as he spoke the girl turned her face towards one of the windows.

Then those present heard a little murmuring cry of gladness, saw her start from her seat, and a minute after she was on the lawn, her arms about the stranger's neck.

"Oh! my dear, my darling old dad!" and the man did not speak for gladness, as he caught his child to his breast, and felt her happy tears upon his cheeks.

She clung about him in a very passion of welcome, then leaning back held him from her a little way to see if any change had come to him, and being satisfied with her scrutiny, caught him to herself again and drew his tall head a moment on her bosom.

Then he found power to speak calmly.

"Come in, dear; the wind is north-east and your dress is thin."

"As if I could remember that now you are here!" reproachfully, "Oh, how I have missed you!" and she leaned on his arm as they went back to the house. Mr. Vandeleur received a very warm welcome, and Bertie, still one arm thrown about his shoulder, her face pale with excitement, hereyes filled with tears (to Hirst's surprise), introduced him to Margaret with every appearance of pride in him. Then she turned to Mrs. Lomax—

"You will excuse us, I know; father has come to take me home. This first night we should all like to be together. I wonder how he prevailed on mother to spare him even for an hour, so soon after his unexpected return!"

CHAPTER III.

MRS. VANDELEUR bent down and gave her hand to Margaret, whilst Mr. Vandeleur, reining in his horse, cast a somewhat displeased look upon Hirst.

"We are going to the meet, so cannot stay to gossip," Bertie said; "but we will but you all the news this evening when we come up; till then, good-bye!" and she started her horse at a gallop, her father keeping by her side in silence.

At last he asked,—

"When does Hirst Lomax mean to speak?"

She smiled as she answered,—

"He has spoken, and been declined with thanks. I hope, dear, you aren't angry—but really I prefer staying with you to reigning at the Hall."

"I am very much disappointed; I had so set my heart on the match. Is it quite hopeless to wish it still?"

"Oh! quite. Once he tolerated me, now I believe he detests me. Besides, father, you must see for yourself that he has formed an attachment for Miss Ashwin. You must find me another husband," laughing, and then they were joined by a fair, rather handsome man, who greeted Bertie with some effusion.

"I was afraid you wouldn't show up, Miss Vandeleur. I said I should be content if you did, but I'm not. I now wish you were to ride with the hounds. You are too good a horsewoman not to join the hunt!"

"Thank you, Mr. Lanark; but really I think I could not screw my courage up to such a pitch. I should lose my head, and when once I do that there is small hope of my recovering my balance for hours."

"I passed two of our friends on the road, Lomax and that lovely girl, Miss Ashwin. I think you call her."

"Yes; they make a very handsome pair," her soft, bright eyes meeting his archly, and she smiled.

"Do you believe he will marry her? Won't it be somewhat of a mesalliance?" he questioned.

"I should say he won't be such a fool!" Mr. Vandeleur said; but Bertie broke in lightly,—

"He could not give the Hall a lovelier mistress. She is a lady by birth, a clergyman's daughter, and Miss Lomax has promised her a dowry. So you see, Hirst will not prove himself so very foolish."

"Ah! speaking of Miss Lomax, she is very eccentric; instance her whim for this unknown girl."

"She is a worthy woman, Mr. Lanark, and," laughing, "I take credit to myself for saying it, because she hates me as a certain friend of ours is said to hate holy water. I suppose we part here!" and as Mr. Lanark rode away he thought,—

"It is quite true; she never cared for him. She is a pretty girl, but too sharp of tongue, too fond of coquetry; in all probability she will degenerate into a cross old maid. It seems a pity. I always thought Lomax indifferent to her. I was right!"

That night the Vandeleurs dined at the Hall, and Bertie was looking her prettiest in a gauzy black dress, draperies of cream and crimson, with ribbons and flowers to match. She found matters rather dull, especially when Hirst and Margaret wandered out, as it was growing their habit to do now the nights were bright.

She yawned behind her fan, then rose and played a few airs in a desultory fashion, and whilst she played Hirst was telling his love-story under a starry sky. He had brought Margaret into the ladies' walk—a narrow path shaded by tall cedars, and leading to a rockery; he had been very silent throughout the walk, and was now embarrassed—an unusual thing with him. As she leaned against a tree he stood looking at her with passionate admiration and love; he moved nearer and took one of her slender hands in his. In the clear light of the newly-risen moon he saw her face grow paler, and the long lashes drooping hid her beautiful eyes.

"Margaret," he said, and paused, whilst a tremor passed over her; and again, "Margaret, do you know why I have brought you here?" and still she did not answer, only he thought her fingers returned his clasp. "My darling, I want you for my wife. I have nothing to plead that may win your favour, if indeed you do not love me. I have no merit, no goodness, my only recommendation is I love you with all my life;" then he waited for her to speak.

He saw the red lips quiver, and when she lifted her eyes they shone bright through tears.

"Mr. Lomax," she said, "you do me too much honour. You seem to forget my position in your house, and utterly scout the idea that my past may have a story that would displease you—

shame you. You know nothing of me or mine save what I have told you, and it is scarcely probable that I should give you any but the most favourable account."

She ceased, and he said, with simple manliness,—

"I love you," and threw an arm about her, "Is it yes to my prayer?"

Her chin dropped on her breast as she spoke, hurriedly,—

"It is hard to plead against oneself—hard to refuse so dear a blessing as your love, and yet I would be just to you. I want you to remember I am poor, unknown, friendless—that Mrs. Lomax wishes to see Bertie your wife. Oh! I am afraid that in the future you will be sorry for this—will regret what cost you so much," and with her free hand she covered her eyes.

But Hirst clasped her closer, and, bending, kissed her throat and waving hair.

"Dear, do you love me?"

And she answered, falteringly,—

"Yes—yes. So much that I am afraid to marry you."

He laughed outright.

"Dismiss that fear, Margaret. I shall never be sorry because of to-night—I shall never be less proud of, less glad in you," and the stars shone down upon them as they plighted their troth.

A long while after they sauntered through the conservatories, talking lovers' talk, Hirst with his arm passed about Margaret's waist.

They paused once in the midst of flowers and ferns, and the young man caught her to his heart as he told her again and again of his love; and neither of them saw the white face that peered at them through green leaves, nor the slim hands clenched, as a slight figure fell back upon the garden-seat with eyes dreadfully staring.

In utter, happy ignorance they moved on, and no sound, save their footsteps, broke the stillness, but when the last echoes of that slow tread died away a woman's voice wailed,—

"Oh, Heaven! I love him!—love him!—love him!" and a pair of white hands went up to cover the dreadfully staring brown eyes.

Then there was a little rustling sound as of woman's skirts, and in that moment Bertie slipped to the ground and hid her face in her folded arms. She laid her brow to the cold seat as if to cool the fever there, and moaned helplessly,—

"I loved him! and he never knew! Oh! Heaven! he never cared!"

Then she started up. There were no tears in her shining eyes, but her face was ghastly.

She wrung her locked hands together, then clasping them behind her head, stood silent and motionless.

From the house came the sound, "In the Gloaming," and she knew it was Margaret who sang, and probably Hirst who accompanied her. The clear soprano rose and fell with bell-like distinctness, and the closing words reached the unhappy girl where she stood.

"He will never know!" she said again, in a wailing tone. "I—I always loved him, but he never guessed it! He did not even wish it! He thought me slight and foolish! Bitter of tongue! He saw no beauty in me!"

She heard her father's voice calling her, and she crouched down behind the ferns, fearing he would seek her.

She heard, too, his step close by. He passed so near she could have touched him, but she kept in hiding until he turned and re-entered the house. Then she rose and mechanically smoothed her hair and her dress, and laughed low and bitterly.

"I said when I lost my head I was like a horse and could not easily recover my balance."

Then she went wearily threading her way amidst choice flowers and plants, whose odours sickened her. She was faint and ghidly, and there was no friendly support near. She staggered on with wild, white face, and eyes that saw nothing.

Reaching the Hall she guided her steps with hands that feebly felt the wall, and when her father's voice beside her (yet sounding so far

way) struck on her numbed senses, she threw her arms about him.

"Take me home, father; take me home. I—I am very ill."

He caught her up like a child, but she winced under his touch, for mental had induced physical pain.

"Put me down, dear; you hurt me! Oh, Heaven! Am I dying?"

Mr. Vandeleur, much alarmed, did as she bade him, only he kept his arm about her to support the faltering steps. Suddenly she paused.

"Don't take me where they all are. I can't meet them to-night. Tell them I am ill—anything, anything, so that you keep them from me."

He drew her into the library, and compelled her to lie down; then he went to acquaint their hostess with Bertie's sudden illness.

The girl lay perfectly quiet, with closed lids and ghastly face, only her breath came with a laboured effort, and it seemed to her life was slipping away from her in a terrible nightmare.

Then came the soft rustle of her mother's skirts, but she was incapable of movement or speech, could not lift her heavy lids. The elder lady knelt down.

"Darling, what is it?" and when no answer came, turned to Mr. Vandeleur. "Michael, lift her head, she has fainted;" and when he had done so the mother forced some sal volatile through the clenched teeth.

Bertie was perfectly aware of all they said and did; she strove to sign them it was so, but could not; the petted heiress, the laughing, wayward beauty had got her first cruel blow, and she had sunk beneath it.

"Shall we send for Dr. Maggrave?" questioned the father, anxiously, but the mother said,—

"No, she would not like it. Is the carriage ready? If so, we will take her home. First make my adieux to the company, Michael."

A few minutes after the heavy white lids lifted.

"Mother, take me home," the girl said, feebly and faintly.

"Soon, my darling!" throwing a thick shawl about the slender figure, and then her father entering they led her slowly through the hall, and lifted her into the carriage, where she sank as if wearied out. Mrs. Lomax went out to them.

"I am very much concerned about the poor child; pray send me news of her to-morrow early. If she is no better I shall come up to the Robinsonettes. Good-bye; good-bye, Bertie," but the girl did not answer, and in utter silence she was driven home.

Oh! what a blessed relief it was to be once more in her own room, free from curious eyes, free to look as she pleased, to wail and cry, if by such means she could comfort her agonised heart.

Mrs. Vandeleur would fain have spent the night with her, but Bertie would not have it so.

"No, I am better, and would rather be alone. I will not spoil your rest, mother. Perhaps, too, I shall sleep; I am very tired."

Tired, ah; yes, with a weariness that would cling to her day after day; so tired that her nights would be often sleepless and always cruel, and the bright spring days would wake no sense of pleasure in her, and the glory of summer would fail to gladden or soften her heart.

For one man's sake her world was changed, and she knew, mock as she would at love, it would be her life-long portion, and on that night she could have cursed the passion of which all cets afig, and all men suffer early or late. Poor Bertie!

The long night closed at last, and the cheery dawn entered the room. Bertie sat up and pushed back the heavy hair from her brow.

"How strange my head feels!" she said, "and how giddy I am. Am I really ill, or are these only the results of 'a love affair?' " bitterly, and, sinking back in her pillows, covered her face and moaned like a child in pain.

She took her coffee in bed, then she summoned her maid and bade her dress her; but she felt so

languid, so inert, that her toilet was a simple and speedy one.

The long dark hair was caught up, and carelessly wound about the pretty head, and the slim figure was enveloped in a crimson and white dressing-gown, with bright ribbons at the throat, that gave a little colour to the poor pale face.

The maid looked anxiously at her; the weary droop of the mouth (that yet looked as if it only waited to be kissed into smiles again), the heavy eyes, and the wan cheeks, all enlisted her sympathy.

"But mademoiselle does look ill. Will she have her pillows?" and hastened to wheel a couch towards the fire.

"That will do," Bertie said at last, and the maid disappeared to return in a few moments with the message that Mrs. Lomax was below, and would be pleased to see her.

"Say I am too ill to admit visitors," petulantly, "I must have rest; I have not slept the whole night;" so Mrs. Lomax was compelled to content herself with Bertie's mother.

"O, my dear," she said, "I have news for you, all our hopes and plans are frustrated. Last night, when you had gone, Hirst told me he had asked Margaret to be his wife. Of course he is master of the Hall, and can please himself, and we have no objection to Miss Ashwin personally; but I was so disappointed I cried. You know how dear that child Bertie is to me, and it makes me positively angry to see Priscilla's dislikes of her, and foolish love for Margaret."

"I have seen for some time how matters would be," Mrs. Vandeleur answered, "and you know Hirst is not to blame. Bertie rejected him with positive rudeness—would hear nothing he had to say."

"That was his own fault. If he had been moderately attentive she would have learned to love him, but he always was intolerant to her," vexedly; "and I daresay he blundered dreadfully over his wooing; made it appear he was conferring a favour on her, and you know Bertie's spirit would not submit to that."

"No, we are all very sorry it cannot be, because we had hoped to keep the child with us. Possibly it is for the best, and neither Mr. Vandeleur nor myself would try to force her inclinations. Is the date of the marriage fixed?"

"Oh, yes, by this morning Miss Priscilla had arranged everything. She argues that as Margaret came to the Hall last Christmas Eve, she should go to Hirst on the next twenty-fourth of December, which will allow them time to become better acquainted with each other's foibles. My sister is no advocate for hasty marriages; Hirst, of course, wishes it to be earlier, but Margaret is quite content to wait until December. I really think she is very amiable, but I should be glad to see her more sprightly, more like Bertie."

As soon as Mrs. Lomax had gone Mrs. Vandeleur went to her daughter's room.

"Are you better, my love?"

"I ought to be; you are all so very kind and attentive. But my head aches so fearfully, and I am giddy."

"Will my talking annoy you, dear?" applying herself to some lace work; "because I've news for you."

"Talk as much as you please, mother. When I am tired I will ask for silence," speaking wearily.

"Mrs. Lomax has been with me, and she tells me Hirst and Margaret Ashwin are an engaged pair"—she worked on and so did not see the increasing pallor of her daughter's face, the clenching of her little hands. "They are to be married next December, on the anniversary of Margaret's first appearance. My dear, I wish I could have seen you mistress of the Hall, I am cruelly disappointed."

Bertie slipped and fell at her mother's feet, her face hidden in her skirts.

"Oh, don't mother, don't! You break my heart! I cannot bear any more pain. I knew this last night. Oh, Heaven! I saw their happiness."

Frightened by her sudden passion, Mrs. Van-

deleur strove to raise her, but she sank yet lower.

"Let me lie here—leave me alone."

And the mother asked in a whisper,—

"Do you love him, Bertie?"

And when the girl only shivered, she bent down and kissed the pretty hair, whilst her tears fell fast—only Bertie did not cry.

She lay silent a time, then suddenly broke into speech, a defiant note running all through her anguish.

"Love him? Why not! Was I not taught to love him? Only I did not know it for very long, because we had been always together. But I cared more for his frown than any other man's angriest words. But when I saw he was indifferent to me, that he only tolerated me, I treated him with disdainful condescension, and said to myself he should never feel himself compelled to marry me. I didn't know I loved him then; I was only angry that all of you tried to thrust me upon him, to make him take me with or without his will. I never was natural with him, and I felt I was changing to all. Not guessing why it was so I grew hard in my thoughts, flippant in my speech, and I was aware Hirst had what they called 'clever flirt,' so before him I flirted outrageously and made sharp speeches, and when others laughed he only preserved a displeased silence."

"Then, at last, he asked me to marry him, and he didn't try to hide from me that he was honouring me beyond my deserts, that but for our parents' wishes, and because he then loved no woman he would tolerate me!"

"My poor child, my poor darling! I did not dream it was like this with you," the mother said, chokingly.

"Even then," drearily, "I did not guess my own secret; I only felt hurt and angry, a little uneasy too. But I was glad I had said 'no' to him, because I thought when he found I was not likely to be won it would make him more eager to win me."

"I knew the perverseness of most well, and how they always long for what seems unattainable; neglecting and despising that which is close at hand. By that time Margaret had come amongst us, and I was rude and hard with her. She is so beautiful, and I was afraid of her influence over Hirst."

"I did not love her then, and now I hate her—Hate her! From the first I distrusted her, and I always shall; and when I saw how determinedly Miss Priscilla espoused her cause, and how Hirst seemed to like to be near her, something woke in my heart, and rising to my throat seemed to strangle me. Oh, Heaven! day after day I smiled and talked, and played my hateful part."

"Day after day I saw them together. I marked the new light in his eyes, the new look on his face, his growing passion for her, his growing contempt for me, and I knew I loved him. But I did not guess how well until last night."

"I was in the conservatory, and I heard their voices; they paused just before me, and he had his arms about her, and was telling her of his love."

"He looked as he had never looked at me; his voice had a new, deeper, tenderer tone, and I almost shrieked aloud, but instead I fell back upon the seat; and once, when my agony grew too great for me, I thrust my handkerchief into my mouth that I might not cry out. Oh, mother! Oh, Heaven! I don't remember how long I stayed there, or how at last I reached the house."

"I don't know when or where my father met me, but when you bent over me in the library I was conscious of all that passed, only I could not cry. I could not move. Mother, mother, mother!" clinging to her skirts, "pity your most unhappy child, and—forget her story!"

Where she had slipped she lay, her face still in her mother's skirts, her long hair unbound falling about her in dark waves, her little hands clenched.

"It has been so hard, she moaned, "so hard that at times I have been almost mad. Oh! he will be sorry for his choice—he will be very sorry. One day she will drive him to desperation. Say I am unjust; say I am blinded by

jealousy, your words will not hurt me. I think I am beyond any further hurt."

Then her mother put her arms about her and lifted her on to the couch beside her; drew her head down upon her bosom, and tried to speak comfortingly, but Bertie only said,—

"You are very good, but I want to be alone. I am ashamed to meet your eyes. Please, please leave me!" So Mrs. Vandeleur stole out, and she lay all that morning with hidden face, having tasted at last the wine of love to the very dregs; having entered suddenly upon her woman's heritage; knowing that unless, indeed, his heart turned to her, sorrow would be her guest through all the days to come.

The cruellest thought to her was that she loved one who never cared to make her heart his, who never sought to win her with tender glances and words that women long to hear. It shamed her to know that though she was all his he would never claim her, never desire her.

"Oh!" she said in her anguish, "I have blindly asserted woman's right and given him all my treasure; now if he learns it let him use man's, and laugh me to scorn. Oh! Heaven, am I to have nothing in exchange for my broken and marred life! Am I always to be the abject slave of an unrequited love?"

"Then half unconsciously she murmured words that came to her again and again, in those dreadful hours of agony."

Then she laughed. "What a fool I am to think I could win what never was mine, could woo him from her! Would I have his love as such a price, his treachery and mine. Oh, Heaven! which way shall I turn for comfort?"

She did not leave her room that day, and at night she was so weary she fell into a restless sleep, haunted by dreams of her waking sorrow. In the morning she rose and allowed herself to be dressed, and went down just as Mrs. Lomax was announced.

That lady exclaimed anxiously, when she saw Bertie's pale face and hollow-looking eyes, "My dear, I am afraid you have suffered dreadfully. You look as though you had been ill for weeks instead of a day and a night; I had no idea your indisposition was so serious."

"You are like the patient man's comforters," Mrs. Lomax, smiling faintly, "and really I am much better to-day; and probably to-morrow I shall be restored to my usual state of robustness and impertinence—I hope so sincerely."

"So we all do, dear! Margaret wanted to come, but I thought two visitors might prove too many for you, and I was too selfish to lose the pleasure of seeing you. I hoped I should be the most acceptable to you, Bertie?"

"And so you are, dear Mrs. Lomax. My acquaintance with Miss Ashwin does not seem to ripen into friendship—understand, the fault is mine. It may be I am a little jealous of her beauty," with the same faint smile; "but you will carry my congratulations to her and tell her I sincerely wish her happiness; soon I will do it in person and not by proxy." She leaned back in her chair a trifle paler, but she sat far in the shadow her visitor did not see that, and only Mrs. Vandeleur guessed her pain.

Mrs. Lomax said, "I will not forget your message, dear, but, oh! how I wish Hirst had chosen you!"

Poor Bertie winced as if a rough hand had touched some half-healed wound, but she answered carelessly,—

"It was well we young ones did not gratify your wish, as the same house would certainly not have accommodated Miss Pricilla and myself. Oh!" laughing feebly, "how she does hate me! I believe she fancies 'all the wickedness in the world is print to me.'"

By the close of the week, if a trifle paler, Bertie was so much her old self that her mother sometimes doubted if that impassioned declaration had really taken place in the pretty pink and blue boudoir, or if it had been only a very vivid dream.

When an invitation to dine at the Hall on *famille* came she was alarmed for Bertie, but the girl said, decidedly,—

"Oh! we will go, by all means. I want to see how Hirst looks the character of 'engaged

man.' I should say he will be amusing, and I want to give Margaret my good wishes, mother."

Miss Ashwin led the girl to her own room.

"You are still pale, my dear," gently, and helping her with her wraps. "I was quite alarmed about you that night you fainted, and we have all been very anxious about you."

"Do you include Miss Pricilla in that 'all'?" laughing incredulously. "Pray don't try to impose that upon me, Margaret."

"Indeed she was, and would have come to you, but Mrs. Lomax prevented her. Don't you know how good her heart is!"

"I know it is too narrow for more than one attachment at a time," lightly. "But now let me wish you all the happiness you can desire. When you first came I said a fitting conclusion to your story would be your marriage with the 'Fairy Prince'; I think I shall go further, and say I prophesied. One consideration only stays me."

"And that?" Margaret asked, smiling, and passing her arm round the slender waist. "What is it? May I hear it?"

"Oh! certainly. I remember an old saying which runs like this, 'A prophet is not without honour save in his own country and amongst his own people,'" and, laughing, they ran downstairs.

When Hirst and Mr. Vandeleur joined the ladies after dinner Mrs. Lomax said—

"Sing that pretty song you gave us last night, Hirst," and explained to her guests the pretty song was composed by a friend of her son's, the words being from one of Tennyson's short poems.

The young man played a low, sweet symphony in a minor key, then began to sing in a very tolerable tenor.

Bertie glanced at Margaret as the young man finished, and saw she was deadly pale, whilst her eyes gleamed with some hidden pain; but Hirst did not see, and Margaret hid her face behind her screen as he sang again with greater emphasis.

(Continued on page 308.)

DIANA'S DIAMONDS.

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE grand finale, the wind-up of the camp season, was a review on a grand scale, and a presentation of colours to our regiment, and a *déjeuner* at our mess afterwards.

We were lucky in a fine day, and I felt that my pretty new dress, got expressly for the occasion, would not be thrown away, but seen to advantage.

It consisted of a pale heliotrope-coloured silk, partly veiled in thread lace, and a small lace bonnet (the occasion was too serious for hats), trimmed with heliotrope velvet—a crinkled bandeau of plush round the brim set off to great advantage my gold-coloured hair.

I carried a parasol to match my dress, and I thought that I looked very nice as I joined Hugh, and strolled down towards the enclosure of spectators that already surrounded the preparations for the reception of new colours. I felt sad, too, as I walked along. This was one of my last days—last days are mostly sad—and neither weather, nor gaieties could possibly excuse my stay longer than another week; and I could scarcely restrain a sigh as I thought of the happy summer I had spent, and the dreamy winter that lay before me.

Of course, Hugh must not guess at my thoughts, nor dream that I was not glad that my time of being on show was over.

I glanced at him underneath the lace of my parasol. It struck me that he looked unusually grave; and, as it were, sick of life, and things in general.

"This will be our last festivity," I said; "the wind-up of a very pleasant summer. I—must go—next week—on Tuesday—I think."

"Must you? Well, what must be must be! Wait till Wednesday, and I will get two days' leave, and take you over myself. I don't fancy your travelling alone!"

"Why not, pray?"

"Well, if you must know, because you are too young and pretty!"

I blushed with pleasure. A compliment of any kind was rare from Hugh.

"Only it's so cold here in winter you might have stayed on. There is some capital hunting, and I have bought that brown mare, and there's lots of balls in winter—country balls."

If he had pressed me a little, little more I would have stayed; but he did not. He relapsed into silence for some moments, and then he said, suddenly,—

"I shall be very lonely when you go!"

What would he be to me in my empty home at Brayfield?

"Yes, we have got on very well, and I have to thank you for a very pleasant visit. At least I've done some good in coming, Hugh!" and my voice shook in spite of me. "You do not think quite so badly of me as you did, do you?"

"No; and yet there is no reason that I should not. Nothing has been cleared up. The mystery is as great as ever. Only the diamonds are redeemed, and Ralph Torpichen is dead!"

"Yes, poor Ralph is dead, and he died without your knowing he was innocent—that he was your true friend as well as mine—that he wished you well."

"Very well. Why did he inveigle you to London?"

"He did not. I made him come with me. I dared not go alone; I was afraid of Joe. I have no head for business, buying or selling, and he has. It was he who sold the diamonds!"

"And pocketed the money?"

"Now, Hugh, that you know in your heart is a ridiculous idea. Ralph was a rich man. Why should I sell my diamonds for his benefit?"

"I acknowledge that I am bitterly prejudiced, and what you urge is true, Rance; but, oh! how long is this terrible time to last? When may I share these cruel secrets? Is there no hope of light at all? I do not know what this may be to you, but sometimes I am so maddened by hopes, or fears, doubts, suspicions, remorse, and rage, that I feel as if I was being torn in two by separate identities. Sometimes I feel that I am a wretch to doubt you, despite all, and I feel inclined to throw myself on my knees, and beg you to forgive me. I feel that it is impossible that a girl so purely and simply brought up as you were, who never had a lover that she cared for, never kissed a man in her life but her father and myself, could suddenly develop into a false, intriguing, fashionable flirt, who looked upon her marriage vows with utter scorn and contempt. Then, on the other hand, I tell myself that I am a weak-minded fool, whose insane love for you have led me to spare you when I ought to have punished you, not by what I feel for you, but what is justice. Sometimes I say to myself, if other men knew all, would they not despise me, for extending to you the protection of my name and roof. Your father was a good man, and as true and honest as steel, but how do I know what you may have inherited from your mother!—what vices you may have drawn in with your breath, and transmitted to—"

"There!" I said, halting, "if you are going to drag that in I shall turn about and walk home."

"Well, I won't. I was only telling you my thoughts, and what I have sometimes imagined—perhaps 'most wrongly'—that you may have inherited from your mother."

"My mother!" The words had barely left his lips when she flashed by in a carriage and pair seated beside a lady, and *vis-à-vis* to two gentlemen. She looked very elegant, and very happy.

"Lady Lorraine!" exclaimed Hugh—and I believe he muttered some imprecation—"she is our evil genius. What brings her here! This is quite out of her usual beat."

"I suppose she is staying with Mr. and Mrs.

Crofter. That is their carriage, and that is Captain Carden with them."

"Mind you don't speak to her, Di," he said impressively.

"Hugh, dear Hugh!" I paused, and sheltered myself from the public eye behind my pretty parasol. "If I do you must forgive me. She holds me in the hollow of her hand."

"A nice person to have got you at her mercy! A divorcee, a woman that abandoned her husband and children."

"I know that—I know all," I interrupted piteously.

"Who told you?"

"She did herself," I rejoined, colouring vividly.

Hugh stared.

"Well, Rames, no wonder you blush! Here we are, and our long *tête à tête* is attracting attention. Promise me, if I do not have another chance of speaking to you alive, that you will make a desperate effort to shake off this mystery—to get rid of this secret. If the worst comes to the worst, buy yourself off. Handsome, pretty, if it takes all your fortune, I have sufficient money for both of us. My godfather left me a decent legacy most unexpectedly, and I am no longer a pauper."

"I promise to do my very best," was my hurried reply, as he joined the rest of the assembly.

The company gathered together to see our regiment receive its new colours was numerous and distinguished. Among them all no one looked more handsome and distinguished than Lady Lorraine. She was dressed in black lace that literally glittered with jet, and the sombre setting suited her still fair complexion. She soon spied me at some distance from her seat, and treated me to many bows and wreathed smiles, but she could not approach me. When the ceremony was over she snatched an opportunity, on her way to the carriage, to say beneath the shelter of her sunshade—

"I see you are all right."

"No!" I answered hurriedly. "And I must speak to you. Oh! do not turn a deaf ear to me this time."

"I don't wish to, you silly girl; I shall manage a *tête à tête* somehow before the day is over."

"But Hugh!"

"Yes, and under your own roof, and in spite of Hugh." Moving on at the *déjeuner* we were separated by at least a dozen people. The affair went off well; the viands were superb, toasts were given, and the band played at intervals. Towards the end of the entertainment there was a commotion, and one of our officers rushed to me, saying—

"Lady Lorraine feels very faint. She told me to fetch you, Mrs. Halford, as you are a friend of hers."

Of course in the face of all the company, and this request, I was bound to go, and I found her in an armchair in the ante-room; one fanning her, another holding salts to her nose; a third madly waving a newspaper.

"It is the heat," she said, languidly. "You live close by, dear Mrs. Halford; you shall take me home with you for a little while, and I will lie down in a cool room, and I shall be all right in an hour's time."

What could I say? I was delighted, of course, and with her usual wit she had managed the meeting most naturally. But Hugh did not look at all pleased when he saw me walking off to our own hut, with the gentle invalid on my arm.

"No. No one was to trouble about her, she preferred to be quite alone, and would trust herself entirely to Mrs. Halford's kind hospitality."

CHAPTER XLIX.

"Did I not manage it well?" she said, in her natural voice, as we entered the hut. "It was awfully hot though, and I shall just go

into your bedroom, and bathe my face and hands; it will refresh me."

Peggy came in and attended, but there was no smile of welcome or recognition for my mother from Mrs. Clark.

"Well, old Peggy, you are getting younger every day," she said. "You don't seem to remember me!"

"Remember you! Oh, yes, ma'am. No one who once knew you was ever likely to forget you," said Peggy, with biting emphasis.

"Now I wonder if you mean that as a compliment, or otherwise!" she asked, as she arranged her hair.

"Whatever way you like, ma'am," said Peggy grimly.

"Come into the drawing-room, Diana!" said my mother; "and don't let anyone disturb us, Peggy. You may as well bring us some tea presently." And taking my arm, she led me across the passage into our pretty sitting-room. As she stood and surveyed it, and took in all my embellishments—flowers, photos, fancy work, pretty curtains, and a piano, she exclaimed, "What a charming little nest! And of course Hugh and you are a couple of love-birds. I knew you would soon bring him round and tame him, ferocious as he was! It's an art that runs in our family."

"An art that has not descended to me! We are anything but a pair of love-birds; as to taming Hugh, he has tamed me. He has never forgiven me, and I am only here for the sake of appearances, and to silence Mrs. Grundy."

"And a sweetly pretty appearance you make, my child! you look lovely in that mauve dress!"

"Oh, mother!" I cried passionately, "how can you talk like this when my heart is breaking! I have been a mother too. I know a mother's feelings. How can you bear to cause me—your own child—such sorrow and such shame."

"Oh, come, my dear, we are not on the stage! You really have quite a tragic air. I would not be a bit surprised if you could act. You would make a fine tragic actress!"

"Act! I am sick and tired of acting, and playing a part, pretending that I am happy in my home, when it is really nothing but a whitened sepulchre!"

"Now, now, that is not very flattering to this dear little hut! Sit down quietly instead of wearing out the carpet, and let me talk to you reasonably. You got the diamonds, I conclude?"

"Yes. Did you send them?"

"I did. I have made you the *amende honorable*. You may not have heard that Sir Roper is no more. He died nearly a year ago. That yachting trip did not agree with him, poor dear man! He left me a large annuity, and a most unexpected sum in ready cash, so I was able to redeem your necklace. You may thank Captain Carden for that. He never gave me any peace till I did so. I am going to marry Captain Carden as soon as the year is out!"

"Mother!"

"There now, you need not scream. I know I am ten years his senior, but I do not look it; and every woman is just the age she looks, and no more. At a distance, and with my back to the light, I pass for eight-and-twenty. Now, you look older than you are. We might easily pass for sisters!"

"And can you wonder! I feel as if I were fifty, but I cannot realise what you tell me about Captain Carden. I cannot imagine him my stepfather!"

"And you need not after this. We shall never meet again on this side of the grave. This is our last interview."

"Then, in that case, mother, you will surely release me from my promise now! The release will cost you nothing, and it will set me free from torture. Oh, mother!" I cried, rising suddenly, and throwing myself on my knees before her. "If you will not take off my chains I must break them! Life, as it is, is too bitter for me. Hear me, I entreat of you! Seizing her hands in mine, "Once you said I held your life and fate in my keeping. I did not fail you.

Now, the situation is reversed. You have my fate and my happiness in your power. I will not let you go till you release me from my promise!"

She smiled a smile that boded ill. I knew it well of old. She looked down at me as if I was some quaint, amusing spectacle—not her only child on her knees before her—and, as it were, begging for her life!

"Have pity upon me!" I cried, and then I burst into tears.

Someone entered the room at this moment. Someone threw wide the door. It was Hugh, but when he discovered me grovelling before Lady Lorraine he closed it sharply on the inside, and said—

"Diana, may I ask the meaning of this! Get up at once!"

"Oh!" exclaimed our visitor, rising. "I see we are going to have a scene, and I shall go!" taking her gloves.

"Not before you release my wife from whatever ridiculous promise she has made you. Not till then, Lady Lorraine!" said Hugh plucking his back to the door, and looking very determined.

"You would detain me here by force, sir! Conduct very becoming to an officer and a gentleman; but I can easily open the window and call out!"

"If you do you will be sorry for it," he rejoined. "If you have that unhappy girl in your power I have you in mine."

"As how, most chivalrous host!" she asked, with a sneer.

"A friend of mine knows all your past. Every particular can be mine within twenty-four hours. All facts detailed, and I shall not scruple to use my weapon, and to drive you out of decent society. Take your instrument of torture off my wife, and you shall go free. If you refuse to do so within forty-eight hours I guarantee that no respectable woman will speak to you, that no man who values his position will be seen in your society, and that you will be glad to go abroad and spend another ten years in rehabilitating your character, and giving people once more time to forget. So choose. I give you ten minutes. It is now exactly a quarter-past four. You see at twenty-five minutes past you can go if you please; but if you go without making a clean breast of it, that door, as you pass through it, takes you not merely out of this house, but out of society."

I stood amazed. Here was a champion indeed! Cruel as Hugh seemed, how much more cruel she had been to me! She stood as if stupefied, and looked at Hugh, her face livid with passion. Her fair eyebrows stood out from her fair head like the bristling of an animal's hair. Her eyes flashed, her lips worked, and her expression was really terrible to see. Hugh, on the other hand, was surprisingly cool and collected; not a bit as he used to be when I was in his black boots—he was not in a passion. He calmly took up a newspaper, and threw himself into an armchair, as if no one was present.

"I wish you joy of your husband!" said Lady Lorraine, in a kind of choked voice. "No wonder you talk of having a broken heart. I shall not intrude on this fair domestic scene any longer—casting a glance at where I leant against the mantel-piece, with a tear-stained face, and dishevelled hair, and another at Hugh, who was almost concealed behind *The Field*."

Then she moved gracefully towards the door. As she did so he laid down the paper, and turned and looked at her. He seemed to hold her spell-bound by his eyes. She faltered with her hand on the lock, and said—

"What is the name of your detective friend?"

"George Grahame, late major in the regiment of Central India Horse."

At this potent name she recoiled as if she had been struck a blow. She seemed, as it were, to collapse, to lose all her temper, anger, courage, pride—aye, and her beauty.

"Diana," she said, sinking into a chair, and covering her eyes with her hand, "you may tell him. You are released from your oath."

I, now that I was free, trembled exceedingly,

but I went over to Hugh, and took his hand, and said—

"Hugh, you will understand everything when I tell you that Lady Lorraine is my mother!"

For a moment he stood stock-still and silent, and then he exclaimed—

"It cannot be—it is not true. Your mother is dead!"

"Do you refuse to believe in old relationship?" said Lady Lorraine, looking up. "Compare our faces, our hands, our height, and then say if there is no tie between us."

She stared at him hard as she spoke; and he, with a kind of groan, exclaimed—

"What you say is true. I never noticed it before. Yes, there is an unmistakable family likeness."

"You little guessed that Lady Lorraine was your mother-in-law, did you? Now, you will scarcely care to bound a member of your own family from society, will you?" and she laughed—such a laugh.

"And how long has she known!" said Hugh, not noticing the conclusion of this speech, and pointing to me.

"Eighteen months."

"What was your object in discovering yourself?"

"The natural yearning of a mother," she rejoined, with a peculiar smile. "Now you know you may release me. Diana will tell you all there is to tell. We need never meet again!"

"But I always understood that Diana's mother was dead!" said Hugh, evidently not yet fully satisfied.

"Dead to her. Spare me the task of raking up the ashes of my past."

"Certainly, I will, before your daughter," he said, unusually sternly.

"One word before I go—a jealous husband is an abomination. You are ridiculously and unnecessarily jealous—jealous of Ralph Torpichen. Diana has no spirit. She submitted to her misfortunes. She is a little fool, and a great deal fonder of you than you deserve. If you had had to deal with me it would have been another story."

"I thank Heaven that I had not, madam!" making her a low bow, as he opened the door for her to pass out.

She, on her part, made him a sweeping, satirical curtsy, nodded briefly to me, and so departed. I have never seen her since.

CHAPTER I.

"Now, Rance, tell me all about it," said Hugh, when the door closed upon our recent companion.

"There is so much to tell, I don't know where to begin."

"Begin at the very commencement, and go straight ahead. How did she first discover you?"

"By the necklace. The first time she saw it on my neck she nearly fainted. She questioned me closely, and after about a month she came to me one evening and made me swear to keep secret something she was going to tell me, and that I must know. I begged and implored of her not to tell me, or to allow me to share it with you; but she would not hear of this, and then she told me that she was my mother. Like you, I could not believe it at first. I had always thought of my mother as dead—a kind of halo of mystery and romance and awe enshrined her memory. To find my mother alive, and standing before me in the person of Lady Lorraine, was a great shock!"

"So I should fancy."

"After this she used to come to see me till you forbade her the house, and then she made me meet her in Ralph's rooms one night when you were away. She had such influence over me she could make me do anything. Often, when I was alone I swore to myself I would resist her, although she was my mother; but when we met

it was always the same old story. I did whatever she ordered."

"And what did she want?"

"Money—money, most desperately—to pay her debts before a certain day, and save her from utter disgrace. She said that if I did not save her she would commit suicide without fail. I told her I had no money that I could spend; that it was all strictly secured. I offered her my pin-money. It was but a drop in the sea, and then she thought of my diamonds."

"Ah! I am not surprised at that!"

"And suggested that I should get rid of them. She had first of all deliberately planned out the train I was to go by, the shop I was to sell them at, and who was to go with me. That latter arrangement was not so easy. Ralph was most reluctant to have anything to say to it. Indeed, he refused."

"And showed his sense, like a wise man."

"Mother talked me into talking him over—that was when he came to tea. I prevailed on him to escort me, and he agreed, though he said he had a presentiment that we should get into hot water with you."

"And his surmise was perfectly natural!"

"Then we went to London. He managed the sale, got the cheque, you saw us at lunch. And, oh! how terrified I was! I felt as if I had been committing some crime. However, you did not recognise me, and I got home safely, and paid over the money to my mother, and there was an end of the matter."

"Excepting that then I found you out."

"Yes. And what my secret has cost me, you may guess. No; I don't think you could guess."

"Why on earth was I kept in the dark, and would never have known—never! She would have kept your mouth shut always, only I managed to put the screw on her."

"I think it was because she thought you would not have allowed me to pawn the diamonds."

"And she was perfectly right; I would not. She never said so true a word as when she called you a goose."

"Only a goose about you, Hugh," I amended.

"That's true; and also that you are ten times too good for me, and that I have been a jealous, cruel, ruthless savage!"

"Yes, I think you have," I said. "I must say I quite agree with you."

"And if I am a savage you have been a cat's-paw, madam, used quite mercilessly in dragging your mother's chestnuts out of the fire, and thereby burning your pretty little fingers most painfully"—lifting, as he spoke, my hand to his lips.

"Rance, I am sorry to say it, but I must. Your mother is a wicked, heartless woman. She used your innocence against yourself, and sacrificed your happiness, eye, and mine, as if it were of no more value than a bit of thistle-down, or an old glove."

"Yes, that is true; but let us forgive her, and try to forget her for the future."

"You may, but I can't. No wonder your father abjured the world, and hid himself in the depths of the jungle. What a life she must have led him! So handsome, so utterly heartless, so selfish, and so bad! I don't suppose you know her real past!"

"Yes, she gave it to me in writing. I have it in my dressing-case."

"She never gave you her real story. She dared not," cried Hugh, flushing up to the roots of his hair. She would never, never show herself in her real colours to her own child. She has surely some remains of what was once self-respect."

"Miss Rance," said Peggy, opening the door. "Oh! an' is she gone?" looking very eagerly round, as if she could be up the chimney, or under the table.

"Yes; never to come back, and make any more mischief between Miss Rance and me," said Hugh.

"Heaven be praised for that same," said Peggy, pliously. "And who do you think she is, after all?"

"Why, Peggy, of course we know, we all know now—my mother."

"And so I thought till latterly, but I found reason to change me mind. However, as I thought she was maybe gone for good, I said nothing. She is no more your mother than I am!" concluded Peggy, impressively.

"That's the best thing I ever heard you say, Peggy," said Hugh, springing up, and shaking her hand. "If it is true, ask for anything I possess, and it's yours."

"And suppose I was to ask for Miss Rance—that is all the same as me own child!"

"No, no, Peggy, you would not do that. But tell us quickly—who is Lady Lorraine?"

"She is your aunt, sir, by marriage; Miss Rance's mother's sister—her Aunt Sophy. Oh, dear, dear me, she and the mistress was always as like one another as two drops of water, and she had great influence over your mother, who was only weak—whilst she was wicked—oh! rare and wicked!"

"I was so happy to hear that Lady Lorraine was only my aunt that I could not speak for very joy. Agitation strangled the words in my throat."

"Go on, Peggy," said Hugh, imperiously. "Tell us all—everything about her—and whilst you are telling us, sit down."

"Oh, well, it's a poor story. There was a lot of mighty pretty sisters that came out to India, and married. Some were good, and most was bad! Mrs. Manners was rare and lovely, and she married Dr. Manners because another man jilted her. She did not care for him at all, only she wanted a home of her own, and was bullied by her sister. Dr. Manners, the poor master, fairly worshipped her and the ground she trod on, but she was blithe and gay, and always wanting dandies and good company, and new dresses. And he was quiet and dark in himself, and may be a bit stern, and she was afraid of him."

"In fact," interrupted Hugh, "they were a couple on the pattern of your young lady and me—to cut it short."

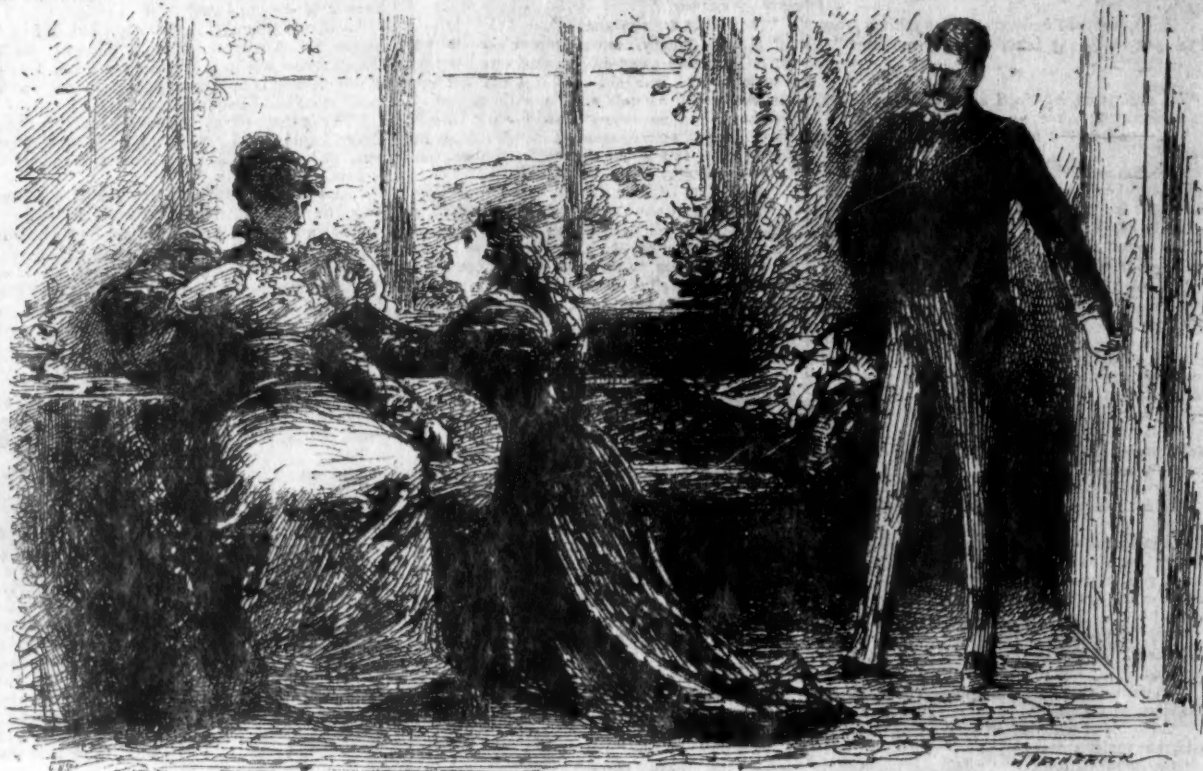
"Indeed, no," interrupted Peggy warmly. "Miss Rance never was a flirt or a gadder, and her father was twice as good a husband as you are."

"That settles it—settles me!" said Hugh, looking at me, with a laugh. "I'm no match for Peggy, and though you may be afraid of me, I'm afraid of her. Well, Peggy, go on!"

"Everything was nice and pleasant enough, till Mrs. Gallop came. That's Sophy, and she soon turned the house upside down, and put all sorts of bad and extravagant notions into your mother's head. She told her your father was a stupid old idiot, that did not appreciate her; that when a woman was young and pretty she ought to amuse herself; and, indeed, she spoke to willing ears. She borrowed your mother's money and jewellery; she half wore out her clothes, and she made terrible trouble between master and mistress. Oh, terrible! After about six months he could not stand her any longer, and one day he gave her her railway fare, and just turned her out. She was mad, she had such grand times with gentlemen, and she was raging at having to go, and I heard her say she would pay him out yet, and she did; for when, a month after, your mother ran away with Colonel Paget, it was all Mrs. Gallop's plotting and doing. Your father never held up his head again. He got a divorce, and took you and your brother and Tony and me off to roam the world, and he settled on the old bungalow. He had seen it once, he said, years before when he was out shooting, and it seemed a very good hiding-place for a broken-hearted man."

"But how do you know Lady Lorraine is my Aunt Sophy?" I asked. "I thought you recognised her as my mother, that time at Southsea!"

"I did at first! Her face was the same, but when her wicked tricks began I misdoubted; but it was Sophy, and we have always heard your mother was dead. If I had been at Southsea, instead of nursing poor Tony this trouble would never have happened, for I would have seen and known her, as I did to-day. I can swear to Mrs.



"DIANA, MAY I ASK THE MEANING OF THIS? GET UP AT ONCE!" SAID HUGH, STERNLY.

Gallop; she has two little moles on her wrist. I saw them when she washed her hands, and she is taller than your mother, and your mother had eyes like you; but Mrs. Gallop's were dark blue—now yours are dark brown.

"But how could she dare to tell me such a dreadful story, and personate her dead sister!"

"Oh! she is wicked enough for anything; and she does not know what dare means! You were useful to her, Miss Rancee, or she never would have troubled you—only it was the necklace tempted her."

"Yes, it is always at the bottom of my misfortune, Hugh," turning to him abruptly. "I shall sell it now in earnest. I shall never wear it again. Let it be broken up and scattered to the four winds."

"Very well, my dear; as you please."

"And is my mother really dead, Peggy?" I inquired, anxiously.

"Yes, miss. I was speaking to a man two days ago—a contractor in the camp—he and Tony was in the same regiment twenty years ago at Lahore. He knew your mother well, and the whole story; he told me she died about two years ago; he saw her grave in the cemetery there. She was a weak-spirited lady, and the shame, he said, killed her. No other lady would look at her, and she fretted for her children, and the disgrace she had brought on them. Yes, Miss Rancee; your own mother was weak and easily led, but she repented sorely of her sins before she died. This man, Sheridan, can tell you that his wife attended her on her death-bed. She is dead now."

"What is to be done with your Aunt Sophy?" said Hugh, now pacing the room. "She is staying at the Clifton's, and is within easy reach. I shall have it out with her. Yes, I'll ride over to-morrow after breakfast, and let her know that she has been found out, and that we are no longer her dupes."

"I need not go, need I?" I asked, with a sinking heart.

"You shall never see her again if I can help it," was his answer; "and after I have done with her to-morrow, believe me she will avoid you like the plague for the remainder of her days."

Hugh was as good as his word. The next morning he started off, was absent three hours, and when he returned he produced a note, which he handed to me with some triumph. I tore it open, and it ran as follows,—

"Yes, I am your aunt, Sophy Gallop. Your mother died eighteen years ago, and is buried at Agra. Your husband makes me write this. I promise never to see you or communicate with you again. On his part he promises to respect the secrets of my former life. A credulous simpleton like you was a strong temptation to a wicked, prowling lioness like me. This is all the excuse I can make. Forget, if you can, that you have ever known, to your cost, your mother's sister."

P.S.—The story I wrote for you was a story!
"SOPHY LORRAINE."

After this Hugh took two months' leave, as the leave season had commenced, and we went off abroad on a kind of second honeymoon.

The delights of Paris, Florence, Venice, and Vienna were new to me; and I enjoyed everything with the zest of youth, of novelty, and of a clear conscience.

Peggy refused to accompany us for once, and paid a long visit to some relations among the Dublin mountains; but she is as much a portion of our household as I am myself, and rules Hugh with a rod of iron.

After all Ralph Torpichen was not drowned. He clung to a spar, and was picked up in the channel by an American-bound steamer.

Hugh and I spent a very pleasant fortnight between Torpichen Park and Brayfield Rectory, and Ralph undertook to dispose of my necklace—finally, and for ever.

It was broken up and sold in separate lots all

over Europe. The celebrated necklace is now scattered far and wide, and the knowledge of this causes me no regret.

As to the "Evil Eye" it has gone eastward again. It is now the property of a Persian Prince. Let us hope that it will work him no misfortune. The necklace realised a large sum of money, which we are going to invest in a nice country place whenever Hugh turns his sword into a ploughshare.

Of Selina I see but little. Mrs. Halford corresponds with us regularly. Joe has married our kitchen-maid and keeps Kitty in state at "Rival's Green," and is always more or less in a state of inebriation.

He had the impudence to write to me lately, and ask for the loan of a hundred pounds!

We spent the winter at the camp, despite the climate, and I rode the brown mare with the Kil-dare hounds all through the season.

I went to frequent dances, as Hugh had foretold, and I was as happy—nay, I am as happy—as the day is long, and I have every reason to be so. I have youth, health, wealth, many friends, and a devoted husband; and among my numerous sources of happiness I want one that may seem rather strange. I have got rid of my DIAMONDS!

[THE END.]

SOUTH AMERICAN lovers have a pretty custom. It is well known that when the petals of the great laurel magnolia are touched, however lightly, the result is a brown spot, which develops in a few hours. The fact is taken advantage of by the lover who pulls a magnolia flower, and on one of its pure white petals writes a motto or message with a hard, sharp-pointed pencil. Then he sends the flower, the young lady puts it in a vase of water, and in three or four hours the message written on the leaf becomes quite visible, and remains so.



"DO NOT LOOK SO BEWILDERED," SAID JANET NAIEN, KINDLY.

THE TRIALS OF HERMIONE.

CHAPTER VII.

HERMIONE felt distracted when Miss Stanley asked her name. In her confused state it had never dawned on her that she could not possibly be admitted to such a place as the hostel without a name. Any pause must have been fatal, as the managers would have noticed her hesitation and become suspicious, so she answered hastily, giving the very first name which occurred to her.

"Mary Brown."

"Ladies," said the managers, as they entered a long narrow room, where the inmates of the hostel were ranged round the table laid for supper, "this is Miss Brown, a new guest who has come to us unexpectedly for a short time."

Hermione's reception was kindly enough. Women are not so unkind as some writers paint them, and the sight of the young girl in deep mourning, with such sad weariness stamped on her beautiful face, touched many hearts.

Those nearest her spoke pleasantly to Miss Brown, and as Hermione received her portion of the simple fare provided, she discovered to her surprise that she was hungry.

Little wonder, she had fasted nothing for several hours, and she had gone through a strain enough to wear out the strongest nerves. She was thankful when the meal was over to get back to her little room and try to think out her plans.

The intolerable pain in her head was gone now. She felt stronger and better. She could look the future in the face now.

She had ruined her life. She knew that those few minutes spent in church with James Clifford had blighted her whole existence; but Hermione was not the sort of girl to eat her heart out with useless regrets. Nothing in the world could undo that one mad act. She was James Clifford's wife but as yet she was his wife in

name only, and she registered a solemn vow she would never be more to him till death released her.

After all, when she came to think over things, the name she had given in her nervous surprise would serve her purpose as well as any other. Since she had mentioned having lived with the Carlyons, any variation of her own name like "Lyon" or "Car" might have aroused suspicion.

Brown, at least, was common, and would not create interest. There was, of course, the chance of Miss Stanley writing to the wife of the vicar of Ashley about her, but it so happened Mr. and Mrs. Fenn were abroad travelling for the benefit of the latter's health, and it was most doubtful if any letters would be forwarded.

Hermione told herself reassuringly she was really no worse for yesterday's ceremony. It only meant that she could never marry any one else while James lived; but then she did not want to marry anyone else, she preferred her freedom, and her ill-fated wedding and its consequences had at least done this for her; they had cut her off completely from her detested kindred. No chance now of Lord Carlyon and his mother being able to annoy her with their offers of help. She was utterly and entirely independent.

She stifled a sigh as she remembered Mr. Norton's kindness and the affection of poor Miss Withers; both the lawyer and her late governess would have been her faithful friends, and she must now hide herself from them, lest they guessed her secret; but then, Hermione reflected, both these two would have urged her to accept some assistance from her relations, so it was as well.

After all, Hermione reminded herself, she had nearly three hundred pounds and an excellent wardrobe. She must surely have found a situation long before her funds were exhausted.

For her husband she felt nothing but loathing and contempt. He had deceived her cruelly, and had never loved her; but, strange to say,

what Hermione resented most bitterly was not James Clifford's humble origin, but his intention of applying, in her name, to the new Lord Carlyon for help.

He had won Hermione by sympathising with her anger against her cousin; he had gained her consent to an immediate marriage solely because he had made out that only as her husband could he protect her from Lord Carlyon's guardianship, and all the while he had meant to trade on her relationship to the peer, had actually planned to live on her money until her cousin returned to England, and then let Carlyon keep them both. Oh, it was monstrous, shameful; and how easily she had been deceived, how Clifford must have laughed in his sleeve at her folly.

"And he knows Carlyon is 'soft about women,' does he," repeated Hermione to herself, bitterly. "Well, I'll take care my husband does not benefit by his 'softness'; I will never willingly see James again, and I should not think even Carlyon would be 'soft' enough to help a man for his wife's sake if that wife had left him."

The morning was cold, bright, and frosty, a beautiful December day; the winter sun had hardly risen when, in obedience to the ringing of the great bell, Irene found her way to the refectory. She was looking much better to-day; a good night's rest had done wonders for her. She was brave by nature, and though she knew a hard struggle lay before her, she did not flinch from it.

She gathered from the scraps of conversation which floated to her ears, that nearly all the inmates had work which took them away for most of the day. No employment of a noisy nature was allowed to be carried on at the hostel, except in the rooms set apart for the purpose: one contained the piano and was reserved for those who wished to practice, and who paid a trifling sum for the use of the apartment; the other was for the use of typists and machinists who were also charged extra. By this wise precaution the peace and quiet of the community were secured,

but the two rooms mentioned were very little used, for the hostel was frequented chiefly by clerks and governesses, who worked hard all day, and did not wish to increase their labours at home.

After breakfast "Miss Brown" was invited to a short interview with the managers. No inquisitive questions were asked, but Miss Stanley made it quite evident she felt an interest in the young stranger, and would do her utmost to help her to employment.

"I should like to be a companion best," said Hermione, frankly. "I have been well educated but in rather a desultory sort of way, and I don't think I'm fit to teach others."

Miss Stanley sighed.

"So many girls want to be companions; they don't seem to realise it is an occupation which requires endless patience, and whose duties are never done."

"I know," said Hermione, simply; "but, at the same time, it is not so monotonous as teaching. And if one has no home, no family ties, one might get interested in one's employer's life even though one lived just outside it."

"It is generally supposed people must be very disagreeable if they need to engage a hired companion," said Miss Stanley, gravely, "otherwise they would surely have some relative anxious to fill the post."

Hermione shook her head.

"I don't think that follows. A really wise woman might hesitate about taking a relative to live with her, since, if the arrangement did not answer, it would be awkward to get rid of her; besides," and she laughed frankly, "there is something so hopelessly klump and depressing about a poor relation."

"Well," said Miss Stanley, kindly, "I believe in people undertaking the duties they like best, so I will not say any more to discourage you—only I fear companionships are hard to get."

At the end of a fortnight Hermione could fully endorse this statement—the miles she had walked, the letters she had written, she could not have counted them, and yet she had never got within reasonable distance of success.

One or two elder ladies liked "the look of her," but when it transpired she had never been out before, and had no experience of illness, they gave up the idea of engaging her. Sterner critics told her plainly she was too young and pretty, while one widow to whom she had ventured to give "Miss Carlyon" as a reference, declared that alone settled the matter. Miss Carlyon had married one of her father's servants before he was cold in his grave, and the recommendation of such an objectionable young woman would be valueless.

Hermione began to look very pale and dejected. Miss Stanley's heart ached for the girl as she saw her return home day by day looking more dispirited each time.

"You must not despair," she said kindly. "It is a bad time of year; few people make changes so near Christmas, and then you see you have no experience and no references."

"I have Miss Carlyon."

"My dear, if I were you I would not mention that lady to any possible employer. She has behaved disgracefully, I don't want to wound your feelings if she has been kind to you, but I assure you Lord Carlyon's daughter is no desirable friend for you."

"But what has she done?" asked Hermione impatiently, for this blame of her dead self was agony to her.

"My dear, she eloped with her father's secretary before Lord Carlyon had been dead a month."

"Perhaps she loved him!" suggested Hermione, feeling she must say something in her own defence.

"I am sure I hope she did," said Miss Stanley, "but even that doesn't excuse her conduct. About a week after the marriage her husband appeared at Carlyon and demanded some valuables of hers which he said she had left behind. The butler and housekeeper, however, had never liked Mr. Clifford and refused to allow him to enter the strong-room. If he gave a list of the things, they would search for them. Would you

believe it, Miss Brown, Mrs. Clifford had actually sent her husband for the Carlyon emeralds which she declared were her own. They have been in the family for four generations, and are worth a king's ransom."

"He did not get them, I suppose!"

"No; the old servants were too clever. If they had let him enter the strong-room, I fancy other things besides the emeralds would have vanished."

Hermione thought so too.

"It is really unfortunate for you," went on Miss Stanley, "that Miss Carlyon—that is, Mrs. Clifford—should be your only English reference, and—do you know her present address?"

Miss Brown winced.

"Had she not left it at Carlyon?"

"No. If you take my advice, Miss Brown, you will not speak of your acquaintances with her again. I have known you now nearly a month. I can speak to your refinement and patience, your good temper, and clear handwriting. Of course it is quite an unusual thing, but I feel interested in you, and so I am willing for you to refer anyone to me."

Hermione thanked her wistfully.

"I ask so little of fate," she said, sadly, "only just a niche where I may earn my bread. It seems hard that I should be denied that little."

"It does," agreed Miss Stanley, "but don't despair. When once Christmas is turned things will be better, and they might be a great deal worse even now, for you have told me you have sufficient to keep yourself for some months."

"Yes; but money is not everything, Miss Stanley. I want to feel I have some interest in life. My days are so long and aimless. You can't understand what it is to get up in the morning and wonder how you can possibly fill up the day when I have answered a few advertisements which is over by ten o'clock, there is simply nothing that I must do. The rest of the day is one long blank."

"Have you no friends?"

"I have no friends within reach."

"Don't you like reading? Don't you care for music or needlework?"

"I use to be fond of reading, but I can't take much interest in the fate of heroes and heroines when my own fate is so uncertain. I can do needlework, but I have no mending or making necessary to be done, and while I have no means of earning money, it seems waste to buy the materials for fancy work I do not need."

But the very week after Christmas there was an advertisement in the paper which raised Hermione's hopes.

"Wanted by a widow, whose children are grown-up and scattered, a young lady as companion for two or three months, possibly longer. Apply personally to-day and to-morrow before twelve o'clock, to Mrs. Nairn, Denver's hotel."

"You see," she exclaimed, when she showed the advertisement to Miss Stanley, "some people would not care to take a thing which might only last two or three months, and I—I should be thankful because it would be a beginning."

"I know Denver's hotel," said Miss Stanley, thoughtfully. "It is a private boarding-house near the British Museum. Just the place where an elderly lady in London by herself would be likely to stay. If I were you I should call at once."

But though Hermione got there before ten several ladies had been earlier, and she had to wait sometime before she was ushered into Mrs. Nairn's private sitting-room, and there a surprise awaited her, for the lady who received her looked younger than herself, was dressed in colours, and could not by any possibility be the mother of a grown-up family.

"Do not look so bewildered," said Janet Nairn, kindly. "It is my mother who needs a companion, and as I was in town she asked me to see two or three ladies for her to save her a long correspondence."

"There have been more than two or three," said Miss Brown frankly.

"Yes; but mother hadn't any idea of how many answers she would receive. I do not think," and she looked at Hermione, "the waiter said your name."

"Miss Brown."

"What a dreadful name," thought the doctor's little wife, "and how unsuited to her. She is the prettiest girl I have ever seen, and I am sure it would be a treat to mother just to look at her after some of Kate's friends; but I must be prudent and go to work in a business-like way."

Aloud she said gently,—

"I think you will have gathered from the advertisement my mother may only need temporary companionship."

"Yes," Hermione felt dreadfully nervous; "but I should be so glad if she would try me. I have no home and no friends. The superintendent of the Hostel for Working Ladies at Chelsea has promised to answer any questions, and I would do my best."

"I am sure you would. Answer me just this one question, Miss Brown: Are you a New Woman?"

Hermione stared in perplexity.

"I don't know what you mean. I have never met any women who lecture in public and believe they have a mission, but"—and she smiled a little sadly—"of course, if your mother is one of them, I should be careful not to say anything that would offend her views."

Mrs. Nairn laughed.

"But my mother is not. She is a home-woman to her finger tips. I will tell you a little more about me, and then you will understand. I am the youngest of her children, and she always meant me to be the companion of her old age, but I married. Mother quite approved. We live near her, and see her nearly every day, but it's not the same thing as living at home."

"I suppose not."

"One of my brothers is a country clergyman, the other, an author, is always travelling about, but I have a sister who lived at home till a week or two ago. She is very clever, and is a New Woman of the most pronounced type. I think, myself, mother could have had very little comfort from her society; but when she declared she was going to America for three months to lecture on the 'Cause of Woman's Rights,' mother was terribly distressed. She couldn't keep Kate at home against her will, so I said I would spend as much time with mother as I could, and that perhaps we might find her a companion. Her one desire is that the lady should be young and not have a mission."

"I am just twenty," said Miss Brown, simply, "and I have no mission."

"Do you think you could be contented with a quiet life? Mother keeps very little society. Of course, we think her the dearest woman in the world; but you might think her old-fashioned. She is very gentle and feminine, and—my sister assured us—hopelessly behind the times. I don't think your duties would be arduous, but then the salary is not large. Mother is not rich, and she only offers three guineas a month."

"I would come with pleasure if you think she would try me," said Hermione.

"We live at Brighton, but mother will probably be in London a good deal in the next few weeks. My elder brother is coming home from Australia the latter half of January, and she will like to be near him."

A few more remarks were exchanged, and then Hermione left the hotel engaged as a temporary companion, subject to Miss Stanley's answer to Mrs. Nairn's letter of inquiry being satisfactory.

That same evening Miss Brown was summoned to the superintendent's sanctum.

"My dear," said Miss Stanley, in a troubled tone, "did Mrs. Nairn mention her mother's name to you this morning?"

"No; and I quite forgot to ask. It was only as I got into the omnibus I remembered that it would probably be different from her own."

"It is. You have applied for the post of companion to Mrs. Carlyon."

"Lord Carlyon's mother?"

"Yes. Do not look so frightened, my dear. You seem to have experienced only kindness from the other branch of the family, so I do not see why you should object to make acquaintance with this one; but your friend, Mrs. Clifford,

not on good terms with the new peer and his relations. What I sent for you to ask was, is it necessary to mention your acquaintance with that misguided young woman?"

Hermione was silent just one minute. Could she ever bear it. Could she be with the people she had regarded as her bitterest enemies and not betray herself. Could she hear them speak of her old home, her dead father, and perhaps of herself and make no sign.

Her resolution was taken quickly. Nowhere in the world could she be safer from James Tempest than with the relations he knew she had hated; nowhere could she be more safely hidden from anyone who had known her in the old life.

Mrs. Carlyon, judging from her daughter's remarks, would not reside with her son. Hermione would not be required to accompany her to Carlyon; anything else she could bear—nay, she must.

And then she spoke.

"I would far rather you did not mention that I had known the late Lord Carlyon and his daughter; it might set these people against me. Miss Stanley, if you will recommend me to this lady, I will do my utmost to serve her faithfully."

And the recommendation was so effectual that three days later Hermione started for her first situation.

CHAPTER VIII.

To go back to Lord Carlyon and his strange discovery that the task he had undertaken was almost an impossibility.

When Denis found that the addresses, certificates, etc., on which so much depended were not forthcoming he felt utterly bewildered. Granted that Mr. Home had been very ill; when he spoke of them he was yet in the possession of every faculty, and the very nature of his malady was not one which would obscure his intellect. His every hope seemed fixed on his wealth passing to his sister or her children, and it seemed well-nigh incredible that he should have destroyed or removed the papers, without which his executor was powerless.

Denis thought over the matter till his brain felt ready to reel. Then he remembered the old saying that two heads are better than one. Of course one in London he would consult a lawyer; but, meanwhile, surely someone on board who had actually known poor Home might be able to suggest something.

The Captain was in far too great request this last night of the voyage to secure his attention for a personal matter; but there was Dr. Phillips, who had attended the dead man, and witnessed his will. He of all people could testify that Mr. Home was certainly in his right mind when he gave his dying charge to Carlyon.

Denis was rather intimate with the young medico, and was soon seated in his cabin with a cigar.

"You look ill or bothered," said Phillips, frankly; "you are not going to become my patient at the eleventh hour, I hope!"

"I'm quite well, but dreadfully worried. Can you spare half an hour, doctor, to listen to my perplexities?"

"I'm quite at your disposal till we turn in," said Phillips, "you'd better make a clean breast of it. Are you repenting the charge you undertook for poor Home? It struck me at the time you were letting yourself in for a great deal of trouble."

"Why?"

Dr. Phillips removed his cigar, and answered gravely.

"Because the 'little sister,' the poor fellow spoke of so pathetically, must be turned forty by this time, and you'll either find your ward a soured old maid or a matron with a husband and large family, all of whom may resent your interference with her concerns. It's no end of a disagreeable task trying to help other people," concluded the young medico. "This lady is as likely enough to think you are despoiling her, and her husband will be put out because the money is to be strictly settled on herself."

Carlyon sighed.

"It's worse than that. You thought Home in his right mind, didn't you, doctor?"

"Of course I did. Why do you ask?"

Denis hesitated.

"Cases have been known of men imagining themselves possessed of great wealth, and leaving explicit directions for the bestowing of a fortune which does not exist."

"I can't see what you are driving at. I have friends in the colony who knew poor Home intimately, and they have told me he was a man of large property. I should have put him down as even richer than the will makes him out."

And then Denis Carlyon told his difficulty. The proofs necessary to trace Mr. Home's half-sister had utterly and entirely disappeared.

"He said you would find them in his chest," remarked Phillips. "I suppose you have searched it thoroughly?"

"Every nook and corner."

"There is no secret drawer that you have overlooked?"

"I have examined two—they were perfectly empty."

"You mustn't worry over this," said the doctor, thoughtfully. "Of course the case is one of great difficulty, but I should say it was not impossible. You will have to advertise most cautiously. You know two things which will help you—the lady's Christian name is Lucy, and her mother was Margaret Gordon before she married, and then Mrs. Donald Home! It is almost impossible that there can be two women called Lucy, both daughters of a mother called successively 'Home' and 'Gordon.'"

"If we only knew her surname!"

Dr. Phillips smiled.

"In that case it would be plain sailing. Is it possible, Lord Carlyon, you have no theory of your own with regard to the disappearance of these papers?"

"I thought at first—I feel almost ashamed to say it—poor Home must have been romancing as to his fortune; now, I confess, I am utterly in the dark."

"Well, of course, I may be mistaken; but I would stake a great deal that Andrew Duncan had a hand in it!"

Denis stared.

"He had been with Home for years, and was thoroughly in his confidence; besides, there was money in the desk; there were valuables of great price in the cabin. Duncan could have helped himself to things of far more value than musty old papers. What good would they be to him?"

"There are degrees of honesty," said the doctor, thoughtfully. "Duncan may have been proof against robbing his master, living or dead, and yet have thought it no great sin to make money out of his papers."

"But how could he? The will is in the Captain's hands! Duncan knows—he must know—that the money at the Bank will be paid over to me as his master's executor, even if he has the papers relating to the heiress!"

"Ah! but with those papers he may discover the heiress, and offer to prove her claim to fifty thousand pounds for—a consideration."

Carlyon started.

"I never thought of that!"

"You see," went on the doctor, "to some minds it would be a very trivial sin. He would, probably, find the lady as soon as you could do; and, out of such a rich windfall as fifty thousand pounds, she would hardly grudge him, say, fifteen hundred."

"What made you suspect Duncan?"

"His frantic haste to land. His story about being a bad sailor, and anxious to avoid the Bay of Biscay, I knew to be false. When you detect a man lying you begin to wonder what his object is. For a servant to travel at his own expense overland from Naples to Calais, wasting the free transit to Plymouth given him by his passage-money seemed to me a ridiculous extravagance."

"You mean he wanted to get to England before me and make a bargain with the heiress before I could find her?"

"He wanted to be gone before you discovered the loss of the papers. He ascertained most care-

fully that you were going on to Plymouth before he left the steamer at Naples."

"But the man will have to see me some day, or send me his address unless he wants to forfeit his master's legacy."

"He would be in no hurry about that, knowing it would take a little time to prove the will; and he would have no objection to meet you when your first suspicions have had time to cool."

"According to your theory," said Denis, cheerfully, "I need not distress myself to find my ward. Andrew will relieve me of the task at the sole expense of a small fine from the young lady, which I could refund her out of the money provided for the search."

"She won't be so very young," objected the doctor; "but all the same, that is just what I do think; you have only to wait. Sooner or later Andrew will succeed in his self-imposed mission, and your ward will claim the property."

Denis shook his head.

"I shan't leave matters to Duncan; he might be palming off a niece or daughter of his own on me as Mr. Home's sister."

The doctor looked amazed.

"I never thought of that. Well, I can only advise you to see a clever lawyer, and tell him the whole story. If he doubts Mr. Home's sanity, I'll come and testify to it, provided I'm in England. Poor fellow! it was a mistake to stay abroad so long, and never hold any communication with his family. When people leave their duties to those who come after them, there is generally a heavy burden for the latter. And after all, Home had no real claim on you; he was only what one calls a casual acquaintance."

"I liked him," said Denis Carlyon, frankly; "and I mean to do my utmost to carry out his wishes; only if I fail, I shall feel as if someone else would have managed better."

There were letters in plenty awaiting the new Lord Carlyon at Plymouth. There was, besides, a friendly face.

Mr. Norton had come to meet the ship, not merely to congratulate the young baron, but to confer with him on a matter of pressing business.

"This is good of you," said Denis, as they shook hands heartily, "I did not dare to expect any one to meet me."

The two men were friends, not merely lawyer and client. Mr. Norton had a warm admiration for Denis Carlyon.

"Have you read your letters? Do you know our latest news?"

"I know nothing except what the cablegram told me. I half expected letters at Naples, but none were there. As for these," and he touched the sheet he was carrying, "I haven't opened one. Only tell me that my mother is well, and they shall all wait until we have had our talk."

"I thought possibly you would sleep at Plymouth," said Mr. Norton. "I have a great deal to discuss with you. Mrs. Carlyon was in the best of health when I saw her last. Your sister has gone to America to lecture on 'Woman's Rights.' I expected your mother to be upset, but she only said she felt like a child out for a holiday. She is years younger in heart and feeling than Miss Kate."

"Kate never was young at all," said Denis. "I like Naim very well; but I do wish his choice had fallen on Kate. We could have spared her to him so perfectly, while mother and I shall never quite give over missing Janet."

They engaged rooms at an hotel near the station, and dinner was served at the old-fashioned hour of six.

The two men talked lightly of indifferent subjects till the waiter had retired, then they both drew their chairs nearer to the fire, and Lord Carlyon said suddenly,—

"I am quite sure there is something the matter, Norton. Don't try to break it to me, I'd far rather hear the truth."

"It is not bad news about any one you know or care for," said the lawyer. "I own it is a grief to me, for I have known her from her childhood. I speak of your cousin, Hermione Carlyon."

"I know the 'settlement' pressed hardly on her," said Denis; "but I always meant to do

my best. You know more about the property than I do. Can I raise a capital sum and settle it on my cousin, or must I be content with paying her a yearly allowance?"

"I beg of you to do nothing of the kind," said Norton, impulsively. "Hermione Carlyon has made a fearful mistake. Very soon after her father's death she eloped with his secretary."

"A secretary is generally a gentleman," said Denis, "and after her father's death I suppose there was really no one she was bound to consult!"

"The man was not a gentleman," said Mr. Norton, "the late Lord Carlyon picked him up at a country hotel a few months before his death. He plays a good game at billiards, sings comic songs, and is a fair judge of horse-flesh, all of which commended him to your cousin. As a matter of fact, he was an adventurer pure and simple. His mother keeps a cheap lodging house. His eldest sister is a Board school teacher. The rest of the family are lower still in the social grade."

"And Hermione Carlyon knew this?"

"I am positive that she did not. Clifford is a good-looking fellow. She was desperately angry when she found out she could not inherit Carlyon, and declared she would never see you or accept any thing from you. She possessed about three hundred pounds, and she told me she meant to earn her own living. I can only imagine the money was a temptation to Clifford, and he persuaded her he was in love with her. I read the announcement in the papers. They were married on the 30th of November."

"Seven weeks ago. Have you seen her since? Have you any idea how it has turned out?"

"I have never seen her since, and I have never received a line in her writing. I have, however, had various messages brought me by her husband, and one letter written by him at her dictation."

"Do you mean she is ill?"

"For the life of me I can't tell you. Clifford represents to me that she is dangerously ill, and that he says she needs immediate change to a warmer climate. He is utterly unable to give her the comforts that she requires, and it is my manifold duty to become their banker until such time as you return, when you will at once settle an ample income on your kinswoman."

"And what have you done?"

"I have done nothing."

"But you must surely know that married or single, Hermione has a claim on us, which I should be the first to acknowledge."

"Hermione has."

"But you can't separate the interests of husband and wife however much you may disapprove of him."

"I don't believe they are together. I think his conduct, or his relations, so disgusted Hermione that she left him. That is why I want you not to give Clifford a shilling. It would be helping him and not her."

"But, surely, if she loved him well enough to elope with him seven weeks ago, she can't have left him already."

"It is the only explanation I can think of. You must excuse plain speaking. Hermione hated you and considered you her enemy; she would not have touched a sixpence which came from you. She was a proud, passionate nature, generous to a fault when she loved, but wilful and impetuous—is that the kind of woman to beg for 'an allowance'? Besides, she had three hundred pounds the day I saw her last. In less than a fortnight from thence James Clifford represented her as penniless."

"It sounds strange."

"There is more to come. I told Mr. Clifford I would do anything in my power for his wife if she came to see me. He declared she was ill. I offered to call on her. I am an old man, I have attended many a lady's death-bed, and I don't believe there would have been anything indiscreet in my being allowed an interview with Mrs. Clifford even if she were too ill to leave her room."

"I was told she was far too ill to see me. I suggested my sister should call in my stead; was informed the doctor had absolutely forbidden Mrs.

Clifford to see any visitors. I asked for the medico's name, as I wished to interview him. To that no answer came, and I had a respite from Mr. Clifford's attentions for a week, when he brought a letter, dictated by his wife and sealed with her own monogram."

"And you were not convinced?"

"I was as far from being convinced as ever."

"You don't think he has ill-treated her?" said Lord Carlyon, impetuously. "By George! if I thought so I'd let him know a daughter of our house is not to be lightly injured."

"I don't know what to think," said Mr. Norton, in a perplexed tone. "I feel simply positive neither the messages sent in her name nor the letter she is supposed to have dictated came from Hermione, but whether she has left her husband and he is trying to get money in her name, or whether she is so ill as to be unconscious of his schemes, I can't tell."

"I hope the fellow won't call on me. I should have hard work to keep my hands off him," said Denis.

"He is sure to call. If the worst has happened he will offer you an interview with his wife."

"What do you mean?"

"If Hermione has left him or is dead, and he wants to trade on your pity through his wife he is quite sharp enough to present another lady to you as Mrs. James Clifford. You have never seen your cousin, so how could you detect the imposture?"

Lord Carlyon shivered.

"I don't like it, Norton. Your story has given me a sort of uneasy feeling. If Hermione is not with her husband—what has become of her?"

"That question hanna me," replied the lawyer. "You see I have known her all my life, and I can't bear to think of her wandering about perhaps without a shelter for her head."

"Might there not be a third alternative," suggested Denis, "that she is with her husband, but her pride revolts so strongly from applying to me for help that she refuses to have anything to do with her husband's schemes, and he dares not let you see her lest she should disown them."

"I never thought of that."

"I don't know much about women," said Denis, "but it seems to me a girl like my cousin, Hermione Carlyon, proud of her old name and long descent must have loved this Clifford with all her heart and soul to be willing to sink to the level of his relations. Well, Mr. Norton, love like that does not change or die out in six weeks."

"What shall you do? A nobleman is a public character. The newspapers will announce your return, and the next day Clifford will be at Carlyon."

"But I am not going to Carlyon at present. I have business in London, and I must go and pay my mother a visit. I fear the house in Harley-gardens will seem much more attractive to me without Kate, but it is a lonely life for my mother without her."

"So Dr. Nafra said, and he persuaded Mrs. Carlyon to try a companion."

"You don't mean that she consented?" asked Denis dejectedly; "companions are an awful constraint. They are meek and dejected, one feels one ought to be kind to them, but they are so hopelessly depressed they prefer to be humble and keep in the background."

"I have never seen Mrs. Carlyon's companion, so I can't say if she is like that. I believe the arrangement is only temporary, and that your mother is quite satisfied with Miss Brown."

"What a dreadful name!" said Carlyon.

"There's not much in a name," objected Mr. Norton.

"There's a great deal," returned Denis, "which reminds me I have something to consult you about. How can I find a young lady of whom I know absolutely nothing, except her Christian name, her mother's name before marriage, and the fact that more than thirty years ago they lived at Ashley-house, S.W.?"

"You will never find her," returned the lawyer, promptly. "The search would be a hopeless task."

(To be continued.)

THE UNCLE'S SECRET.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE following week there was to be a grand ball at Lexmore Hall, and the *élite* of the county were to be present, for on this night the young heir was to bid farewell to his many friends; on the morrow he was to go abroad.

Winnie Kinder stood before the mirror in her own elegant room on the night of the ball, clasping a rope of pearls and diamonds about her white throat; but their gleaming whiteness and brilliant, sparkling fire were lost upon her.

"To-night is my last chance!" she cried under her breath, setting her ruby lips tightly together. "If this evening passes without Harold Lexmore breathing one word of love to me before he leaves at dawn on the morrow, then indeed is his heart cold toward me. Why can I not win him from a mere shadowy fancy?"

"Man-like, when she was living, and he knew he could get her, he didn't want her, he wouldn't have her; but now that this Constance is out of his reach forever, he suddenly discovers that he loved her, and is wearing his life away in useless sighing for her."

"If he goes away on the morrow, leaving me free and unfettered for another to win, perhaps, for all he knows, then I shall know that he does not care. My great, worshipful love has been lavished upon him in vain, and the worst of the matter is, that I have stooped from my pedestal of pride to let him read my heart."

"But why, with all of my superb beauty, do I fail to win him?" she cried, appealing to her own reflection in the mirror. "Why not admit the truth? No face can be more beautiful than mine. Men rave over my beauty, and women envy me; but I might as well be ugly for all the good it does me—it will not win me one glance of love from Harold Lexmore's eyes."

As she stood there, the well-known story of a famous tragedy queen, now dead, but who was known to fame long years ago, occurred to her—the story of how the great, gifted actress had stooped from her high position to love one of the poorest members of her company—a handsome young fellow with the face of a Greek god and a shallow, fickle heart.

He was her junior by several years, but love forgets that. He was but a poor, strolling player. She had wealth a duchess might envy.

All went smoothly enough with this love match until a fortnight preceding the wedding. As she was awaiting her turn to go on the stage, standing in the heavy shadow of the curtains, she heard her lover's voice. He was standing behind one of the shifting scenes, talking with one of the chorus girls—a bewitchingly pretty maiden, whose great attractions of face and eyes the great actress had often secretly admired.

They were standing so near she could have put out her jewelled hand and touched them.

"You must not persist in making love to me, monsieur," the girl was saying. "You love our star. You are engaged to marry her. Why, then, do you talk to me as you do? Madame would not only be very jealous, but very angry, if she were to hear of it, and I should lose my place."

"Love her!" he groaned. "Ah, *ma chère*," he cried, "how can you for a moment believe such a thing possible? What man could love her when he looked into her face—it is so frightfully plain, quite ugly, in fact. If she had your beauty, now, with your golden shakels, I might be able to love her; but—with a sigh—" we must take the goods the gods offer, even if they are not given on golden plates."

The great actress waited to hear no more, but went upon the stage with a firm step. Never in her life did she go through her tragic part so sublimely. Women wept aloud, and tears came to the eyes of strong men.

Showers of bouquets fell about her sweet as the breath of Araby. Yet, in the very zenith of her fame, the wondrous genius—a sading there amid the flowers—the prayer that rose up from her poor wounded heart was:

"Oh, empty fame! oh, genius, wealth! I would gladly give up all, if Heaven had but given me a beautiful face; for then I might have won the heart of the man I love."

Many a time Winnie Kinder had thought over the story of this great actress. The tragedy in her own life was a thousand times more pitiful than any she portrayed before the foot-lights.

"I have beauty, and yet I cannot win the man I love," mused Winnie, twining a spray of crimson roses in her raven-black tresses.

She gathered up her fan and bouquet, and throwing her elken train over her white-kidied arm, made her way down to the ball-room.

Harold Lexmore and his friend, Doctor Jolly, of Rosebank, were just entering an arched door-way from the other end of the ball-room; and her heart gave a violent throb as Harold Lexmore made his way to where she stood and asked her to open the ball by dancing the first set with him.

The young doctor, who had been a college chum of Harold Lexmore, had but recently returned from abroad. This was the first visit he had made to Lexmore Hall for long years. It was destined to be a memorable one.

"How pale Doctor Jolly looks to-night—almost as white as the rose he wears in the lapel of his coat," Winnie remarked, carelessly, as they paused for breath a moment beside a jardiniere of rare exotics.

Harold Lexmore followed the direction of her glance, answering quite thoughtfully:

"Yes; I have been bantering him about it; telling him that is rather a bad sign for a doctor to hang out. And he answered that he had rather a strange, romantic story to tell me, after the ball is over, which might in a measure account for it."

"Perhaps it is a love story!" ventured Winnie, wistfully glancing up into the face turned so haughtily and carelessly away from her own.

"I should imagine not," returned Harold, impatiently.

"Shall we walk through the grounds, Harold?" she asked. "See how the moon shines on the trees and the flowers! Remember, this is your last night at home: to-morrow you go away from us."

He murmured something about his duty as host requiring his constant presence among his guests.

Winnie overruled his objections, and he could not refuse without positive rudeness.

He offered her his arm, and silently they walked out into the moonlit grounds together. Ah, surely it was the very night, the very scene and hour for the witching poetry of love!

Ah, the beautiful world into which they went! The illumined park, odorless with flowers, and tinkling with the musical murmur of the fountain, lying about them under the moon's bright pale rays.

They stood before the marble Flora in the fountain, watching the white arm and delicate hand which scattered the cooling spray.

The marble Flora was beautiful with its statuette grace, but the girl standing there with her passionate, living beauty, the moonlight falling on the rich folds of her silver silk robe, was more beautiful still.

Harold Lexmore could feel the white hand trembling on his arm as Winnie bent her dimpled face over the water, gazing faintly, her white lids drooping over her wondrous eyes.

The spell of that witching hour was over her. Softly, under her breath, she repeated the lines of a poem she had read that day. Now it seemed to have a double meaning, invested with all the yearning sweetness of her passionate voice.

Harold Lexmore felt that the words that fell from Winnie's lips were almost an appeal to him. He knew that Winnie loved him, and that knowledge troubled him. He knew what was expected of him; he realised why she had brought him out here in the mystical, poetical, odorless moonlight.

He knew she was waiting for him to take her in his arms, kiss her beautiful, flushed, passion-

ate face, and murmur, "Winnie, darling, I love you. Will you be my wife?"

He was deeply touched—grieved and sorry for her when he saw the light die from her face, and the smile from her lips, as he touched her hand gently, saying:

"We have been absent from the ball room some time, Winnie, had we not better return?"

He would scarcely have recognised Winnie's voice in the answer:

"Just as you please, Mr. Lexmore."

He looked down at her.

"Mr. Lexmore!" Why do you not call me Harold?" he asked. "Have I offended you in any way, Winnie?"

"Oh, no! Why should you think so?" she replied, with a shudder and a hysterical little laugh. "We will go in, Harold, if that will please you best."

He was silent. For the first time in his life he did not know how to answer her; words seemed to him. He led her back to a seat in the ball-room—back to the partners who were eagerly awaiting the reappearance of the beautiful belle of the ball.

Then Harold Lexmore bowed and turned away, thinking to himself, "I would ask her to marry me if I could offer her anything but brotherly affection. On the night that beautiful Constance died I first felt the throbbing of love in my breast, and knew what love was." Then another thought came to him, and came well-nigh wrecking the whole of his after-life, if a thrilling event had not happened. "Why wreck poor Winnie's life because my love dream is shattered?" he mused. "Perhaps I may speak to her after the ball is over. I will give the matter a little thought first."

His reverie was interrupted by his friend, young Doctor Jolly.

"Remember, I have promised to tell you a strange and thrilling story to-night, Harold, over our cigars in the library, after the ball is over. Remind me of the fact, my dear Lexmore."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE grand ball at Lexmore Hall was over. The guests had long since departed, yet in the library Harold Lexmore and his friend, Doctor Jolly, still sat, although the pink flush of early dawn tinted the eastern sky.

"You think I am looking remarkably pale and worn," the young doctor remarked, as he settled himself more comfortably in the spacious arm-chair, and puffed away at a fragrant Havana. "You would not wonder at it if you knew of the thrilling events which have taken place within the last fortnight; but as I have promised you the narrative, here it is, my dear Lexmore. It has all the flavor of romance, but I assure you upon my honour I can vouch for the truth of every word of it."

"The experiences of almost any physician is ripe with thrilling events that would startle the world if they were to find their way into public print. But to the story—pardon the digression, Lexmore,—"

"I was sitting in my office one stormy night some weeks ago, when the door opened, and I was confronted by a tall, dark-faced, nervous young man, who asked if I was Doctor Jolly."

"I bowed in the affirmative, indicating a seat, which he declined."

"It struck me that I had seen that face somewhere before, but where, I could not tell. You know I have been abroad for years, and the faces of my countrymen at home are therefore new and strange to me now."

"I am Doctor Jolly, at your service, sir," I said.

"What can I do for you?"

"I wish you to attend a lady at once, sir," he replied—"my sister. Kindly accompany me without delay."

"Have you any idea of the nature of her illness?" was my next query.

"A fever of some sort, I should imagine," he replied, brusquely. "We make the journey by boat; the place lies down the river a few miles."

"I followed him into the boat. He picked up

the oars, and with a few strokes of his muscular arms the skiff was quickly out in mid-stream, and whirling down with the swift current.

"I must confess, Lexmore, for the first time in my life I felt strangely nervous—queer forebodings, and all that sort of thing, such as many a man has felt when he took passage on an ill-fated vessel that was destined never to land."

"But I was plucky, and I determined to see the adventure through, despite the nervous sensations that were thrilling my heart."

"I was sure that the crisis of my life had come, and, as the sequel will show, I was not very far wrong."

"My strange forebodings increased when my strangely silent companion drew the skiff into the dark shadows of the willows that skirted the river, and announced we were to alight there."

"I followed him over the long rush grass, through almost impenetrable creeping vines and brambles, and at last we stood before a long, irregular, unpainted wooden house."

"After a sharp, imperative rap by my companion, the door was cautiously opened by a tall, gaunt woman, and after a short whispered conversation, she turned to me, bidding me follow her into an inner room."

"A lamp from a bracket on the wall, lighted the ill-furnished room, and by its rays I saw my patient."

"Great Heaven, Lexmore! how shall I find words to describe to you what she was like!"

"I have travelled the world over—I have seen the beauties of every country—but never in my life had my eyes ever beheld such a glorious vision of girlish loveliness as my eyes rested on in that isolated house. Could you paint still whiter the petals of the lily, glid refined gold—it were easier to do this than describe my beautiful patient and do that wondrous face justice."

"I am only a plain doctor; it would take a poet or an artist to describe her. Her eyes were a soft, velvety golden-brown, the fever-flushed cheeks were round and dimpled, and soft brown locks curled in babyish rings over a broad white brow."

"I did all that human skill could do for the beautiful sufferer, for I knew that if she died, life would never be the same to me. Do not laugh at me for being frank with you, Lexmore, and owning that my heart went out to her the first moment I looked upon her face."

"There is some girl for every man in this world, and I knew then that this beautiful creature who had touched my heart had been intended by Heaven for me if I could save her life and win her."

"When I started for home I promised myself that I should call every day to see the beautiful girl; but imagine my great consternation when, upon taking my leave, I was informed by the woman, who claimed to be her mother, that my services would not be required again."

"In vain I expostulated that the young girl's life was still in danger, and that if she objected to me, in Heaven's name to allow me to send some other physician."

"The old woman was inexorable, and ended the controversy by slamming the door in my face."

"I turned away, vowing that I should see the girl again, and that speedily to; and never in the annals of the world was vow kept in a more thrilling manner."

Young Doctor Jolly rose from his chair and paced up and down the room in an excited manner for a few moments.

"Go on, doctor," cried Harold Lexmore; "surely you are not going to do as these novelists do, leave a fellow at the most interesting point of the narrative!"

"I am trying to calm myself to speak coolly of what happened next." And the fair Saxon face into which Harold Lexmore gazed in wonder and curiosity grew still paler as he sunk into his chair with a groan.

"Pray, go on!" cried Harold Lexmore, little dreaming of the sequel. "You hold my interest as deeply enthralled as one of the pages of Emile Gaboriau's 'Monsieur Lecq.'"

"Well," continued the doctor, "I went home with my heart full of that girl's lovely face."

"I was like a man haunted. I knew very well what was the matter with me—I was violently, hopelessly in love."

"And what gave a spice of romance to the affair was that open warfare had been declared against me, and the gaunt female who presided over the house had stoutly declared that I should never see the girl's face again."

"This made me all the more determined that I would see her, if I went through fire and water to do so. Opposition, as is usually the case, made me all the more determined, and as I was putting my wits together, to use a common phrase, to find some means of accomplishing this, the most tragic event of my life happened."

Again the young doctor stopped short in sudden emotion, passing his white hand over his forehead, upon which the veins stood out like knotted cords.

"When I had concluded to pay another visit to the house, the beginning of the end came in the shape of a letter in a strange, cramped, peculiar hand. It was from that female virago."

"For hours after I read the contents of that letter. I paced my office like a man driven mad—yes, mad! I cannot remember now what the exact words were, but their import was this—I wonder the words did not turn my brain,—

"On the night previous the beautiful girl had died. The woman confessed that she was no relation of the young girl's, nor did she know who her friends were, or if she had any."

"She had taken her into her home one night, to shelter her from the storm, and the young creature had sickened and died on her hands."

"She was but a poor, lone woman, and could ill-afford the loss the girl had occasioned her. Would I take the body for dissecting purposes in the cause of science, and pay her what I thought it was worth?"

"If I did not care to do this there were plenty of medical colleges who would gladly avail themselves of this opportunity to ascertain the nature of the disease which had baffled an experienced physician."

"My goodness, Lexmore, when I read that letter, which seemed to me, although I am a doctor by profession, the most inhuman I had ever read, I wonder the words had not broken my heart, for hearts do break for a slighter cause."

"I sent for the body with all dispatch—do not start and stare at me in such horror, Lexmore—not for dissecting purposes. Heaven knows I would have cut my right hand off rather than that. I would save her from the others. No ruthless hand should ever use the knife on that beloved form."

"Not a hair of her dear head should be touched. She should be interred in the family vault at Rosebank."

"I had made a confidant of my mother, and to this arrangement she made no objection, for my sake."

"It was late at night when the body of the beautiful stranger, who had won my heart, even though her name was to me unknown, was brought into our drawing-room at home, where my good mother, out of pity for me, was waiting to receive it, and lovingly clasped the beautiful white hands over the pulseless breast."

"Do not plead to see her now, my poor boy," said mother, with tears in her sympathetic eyes. "Wait till I have smoothed back her hair and arranged her first."

"In fearless sorrow I went back to the library, and paced up and down, awaiting the summons."

"It came sooner than I expected, in a quick, sharp cry from my mother's lips, and through the corridor her startled voice rang out shrilly, 'My son! my son! Come here quickly; I want you!'"

"In a moment I was by her side, and with unspeakable excitement in her face she led me to the couch where the slender, girlish form reposed."

"Look!" she cried, breathlessly, "this is not death! See, there is a faint pink tinge in both cheek and lip. I have held a hand-glass to her lips, and there is moisture on it. Do you not see

that the lovely creature lying before us is not dead! She is alive!"

"In one glance I saw that her words were true."

CHAPTER XV.

HAROLD LEXMORE grasped young Doctor Jolly's hand with a glad cry of relief. There were tears of sympathy in his blue eyes; the young doctor's narrative had thrilled his heart strangely.

"I hope, for your sake, my dear friend, this romance will end in a wedding."

He never would have uttered these words if he had but dreamed who the beautiful young girl was.

The time was not at hand, however, for the startling revelation to be made known to him.

"It will if I can have my way about it," admitted the handsome young doctor, modestly. "She is at my home, now, convalescing rapidly, and has won her way to my mother's heart as well as mine."

It was morning. The household at Lexmore Hall was astir, and Doctor Jolly remembered he had kept the young heir from a few hours of needed rest before his departure. With profuse apologies he arose.

"Well, Jolly, my dear boy, I wish you joy with your wooing," cried Harold Lexmore, genially; and a few moments later, wishing his friend a safe and pleasant journey, the two young men parted.

Neither of them guessed how or where they were destined to meet again.

On his way back to Rosebank it occurred to the young doctor that he had quite forgotten to mention to his friend what a beautiful name his mother's protégée had—Constance Culver.

He repeated the musical name over and over again, smilingly, thinking it would not be long if he could persuade her to change it to Constance Jolly.

The sun was shining brightly on the roses that rioted in glorious profusion around the doctor's home, as with swift steps he ran lightly up the stone steps and entered the house, glancing up blushing at Connie's window as he advanced from the gate, to see if she were watching him.

At that moment Mrs. Jolly and Constance were seated in the pretty pink and white morning-room in earnest conversation. Connie's dark eyes were red and swollen with weeping; the elder lady was very pale.

In vain Mrs. Jolly had pleaded with the young girl to tell her who she was, where her friends could be found, and how she happened to be in this peculiar position. In her own mind she quite believed that the name Constance Culver was an assumed one.

"Oh, Mrs. Jolly," sobbed Connie, wringing her white hands, "believe me, I have not one friend in the whole wide world. No young girl was ever so desolate. Not one human being on this earth is bound to me by a kindred tie. I have no friends—not one. I have had a great sorrow," she continued; "and it has left me heart-broken. I shall never divulge what it is. I—I could not."

Mrs. Jolly was more distressed than ever.

"Alas, for my unhappy son!" she thought, bitterly. "Great Heavens, what a cruel stroke of fate that his heart has gone out to this girl whose past is shrouded in such mysterious darkness. Her face is pure and sweet, but whenever a girl's past life is shrouded in mystery it always savours of guilt. He must not be allowed to follow blindly the inclination of his own will."

She was his mother. She must save him from the fruits of his own folly, even though she resorted to strategy to do it.

First of all she would confess to the girl her son's mad infatuation, and plead with her to go away and save him from himself. If that failed, harsh, stern measures must be resorted to.

Love laughs at locksmiths, but she would put barriers between them that her son's love could never bridge over.

Mrs. Jolly was a determined woman, and she resolved to part them ere her son saw much more of the beautiful girlish face of Constance Culver.

"You will not think it strange or hard of me for

inquiring so pertinaciously into your history, Constance," she said, crossing over to the girl's side. "I have a particular and excellent reason for doing so. My future happiness and that of another is involved in it."

Connie looked up at her with wondering eyes. "I do not understand what you mean," she said, slowly.

"I see I must speak more plainly still," sighed the lady. "I inquired into your past history simply for my poor son's sake, because he thinks he has taken a fancy to you. Hush, my dear! hear me through," she exclaimed, holding up her white hand to check the words that were on Connie's lips. "Youth is impulsive, old age is discreet," she went on. "When a young man is in love he throws prudence to the winds, and unless he makes the right kind of a choice, his after-life is blighted. After the first glamour of love wears off, if all is not as it should be, bitter disappointment and trouble follow. I pity you, my poor girl," she continued, "but I would rather see my beloved son dead than your husband."

Again Connie attempted to speak, but the lady interrupted her with a commanding wave of her jewelled hand, and Connie, her face turning from a deep flush to a dead white, sat looking at her like an image carved in marble.

"You may be a very innocent young girl," continued Mrs. Jolly; "but matters look decidedly against you, and I appeal to your honour not to encourage my son's love. If you are in want of money, and that would be any consideration to you, I will give it to you gladly to go away, without letting my son know your address, or giving him any clue by which he could find you. My son's future happiness is more to me than gold."

Connie had risen to her feet, her face white with horror and mingled scorn.

"Have no fear of my encouraging your son's love, madame," she answered, proudly; "for I could not marry him, even though we two loved each other to distraction. I repeat, I could not. And as to accepting your gold for such a purpose, you insult me. May Heaven forgive you for the words you have uttered, and for the cruel suspicions that have found lodgment in your heart against me. I shall leave your house this very day, within the hour, before your son's return; I am strong enough to go now."

"You will at least allow me to provide you with ample means for the present," she said, secretly delighted at the turn affairs had taken. "One cannot exist long without money."

"I would rather starve than touch one penny of your money," said Connie proudly.

"The girl has spirit, at least," thought Mrs. Jolly.

"But what do you intend to do? where do you intend to go?" asked the lady, as Connie turned towards the door.

"I intend to go out into the great cold, cruel world, just as many a homeless, friendless young girl has had to do before me. God takes care of the homeless birds; surely He will watch over one of His creatures who is cast adrift on the rough waters of life. I think I will accept money enough from you, Mrs. Jolly, to get to London. I think I could do better in a large city—it would be easier finding something to do."

Mrs. Jolly, who was naturally kind of heart, opened her purse and handed Connie a twenty pound note.

It was not much—it would not last long when one had to face the world with only that amount between one and starvation.

Connie would never have taken so large an amount if she had noticed it.

"Do you know anything of city life?" inquired Mrs. Jolly, a little uneasily.

Connie shook her dark curls, replying a sob.

"I will repay you as—as soon as I have earned the money," faltered Connie. And, with a little choking, "I bid you good bye, madame;" she turned and fled precipitately from the room.

In the corridor she encountered young Doctor Jolly himself.

For an instant Mrs. Jolly's guilty heart stood still as she saw her son clasp Connie's white hand with an eager flush on his handsome face, and draw her, quite against her will, into the conservatory among the fragrant blooms.

Would the girl tell him all that had just transpired? She must know—she would know. And the proud, haughty mother, who would have scorned a mean, underhand action, sunk breathless on a willow seat under the shadow of the palms, where she could hear all that was said while she remained unobserved among the luxuriant foliage.

Connie knew that Doctor Jolly had been away the previous evening to a grand ball, but she never dreamed that it was Lexmore Hall.

"You do not say 'good-morning,' Miss Oliver," he exclaimed, gaily. "Why, you look pale." And, with a start of surprise, "Pardon me!" but those brown eyes are heavy with tears. Has anything gone wrong with you during my absence?" he questioned, anxiously.

"Nothing, Mr. Jolly. I felt a little lonely, that is all."

Poor, foolish fellow! those words caused him to take heart of grace. She had missed him during his absence, she had been lonely. He would never leave her again, never!

"Connie" he cried, breaking off a white rose and holding it towards her, "I have a certain question to ask you to-day. Look up into my eyes, sweet, and you can read it there! I am really a beautiful fellow—bachelors usually are. Wear this white rose on your breast when you come down to luncheon, and I will take heart, believing my question, which I might better call a prayer, perhaps, will meet with an affirmative answer. And if not"—and here his steady voice faltered a little—"if you think I have been too precipitate, send the white rose to me in my library, and I will know that it means I must wait. I hang my hopes upon that white rose you hold in your hand. Miss Connie Oliver," he whispered, "be kind to me; and before Connie could find voice to answer him, he had imprinted a kiss upon the hand that was as white as the petals of the rose she held, and the next instant she stood alone, as she thought, in the blooming, fragrant conservatory.

CHAPTER XVI.

In an instant Mrs. Jolly had confronted Constance, snatched the white rose from the girl's fingers, murmuring hoarsely,—

"I will give my son his answer, Miss Oliver."

Constance bowed and turned away, and without another word walked slowly from the house of the Jollys, to do as many a girl had done before her—face the great, cold, cruel world.

An exultant throb of intense satisfaction lighted up the cold grey eyes of Dr. Jolly's mother at the knowledge that she had parted her son from this girl so effectually.

She would not tell him that she had gone until the last moment, when search would be quite useless.

She saw the look of disappointment that crossed his face when he came into luncheon and found Connie's place vacant.

He laid the fragrant bunch of wood-violets he held in his hand on the marble mantel, and sighed.

"Not here," he murmured to himself, and a sudden anxiety filled his heart.

Was she still debating in her own mind as to whether she should give him hope or doom him to despair?

He longed to ask her, but there was a look on his mother's face that seemed to repulse such a question.

He ardently hoped she would join them at tea, but to his dismay no Constance appeared.

"Mother," he asked, at length, unable to bear the suspense a moment longer, "why does not Miss Oliver join us? Surely she is not ill. I should have been informed of it at once had such been the case."

Mrs. Jolly looked up at her tall, handsome son with well-feigned surprise in her cold, grey eyes.

"Miss Oliver has gone," she said, calmly.

"Were you not aware of it?" The teacup William Jolly was holding to his lips fell with a crash to the table.

"Gone!" he echoed. "Surely you cannot mean it, mother!"

"It is quite true," responded Mrs. Jolly. "She left this morning. But before she went she bade me give this message to you."

And slipping her jewelled fingers into the pocket of her silken dress, she drew forth a small cream-tinted envelope which she placed in his hand.

Then turning away to hide the confusion he might have read in her tell-tale face had he but glanced up, she swept from the room.

Doctor Jolly pushed back his chair, leaving his tea untasted, and crossed quickly to the lace-draped window, tearing the envelope open with nervous fingers.

What did the little cream-tinted envelope hold for him—hope or despair?

He drew forth a neatly-folded sheet, smoothing it out.

It contained a faded white rose, and these few significant words,—

"It can never be!" No name was signed to it.

William Jolly uttered no word, but with a heavy sigh crushed the letter into his pocket.

If he had studied the hand-writing closer he would have detected that it was his mother's writing which enclosed the rose which he had given with that vital question to Connie.

Two hours later, when Mrs. Jolly crossed the corridor, she saw her son standing by the lace-draped window, the envelope she had given him still in his hands.

"Mother," he called, wheeling suddenly about, "will you see that a few necessary articles are packed up in my valise with as little delay as possible? I am going away—I am going to leave Rosebank for a few months."

Mrs. Jolly trembled. This was an unlocked-for procedure.

"It is all on account of this girl, I am sure," she cried out in deep distress. "Oh, William, I am sorry, sorry, sorry that we ever saw her, the thankless creature, who may have come from the slums of the earth for aught we know!"

William Jolly held up his hand with a gesture commanding silence.

"Do not speak of Miss Oliver in that way, mother," he said, "for wherever she has gone, my heart has gone with her. She is a pure noble girl. I understand why she left us so suddenly."

Mrs. Jolly gave a violent gasp. "The note you handed me contained a rosebud I had placed in her hand this morning, telling her of my ardent love and begging her to wear the rose to luncheon if she favoured my suit. I see it all quite plainly, mother; she could not love me, and rather than tell me so, she went quietly away."

"And knowing this, you would be so mad, so foolish, as to go in search of her?"

The fair, handsome face into which she gazed flushed hotly.

"Where one's treasure is, there his heart is also," he quoted. "The great, cold world holds my darling, and I am indeed so mad as to go in search of her. A love like mine knows no defeat," he answered.

In vain Mrs. Jolly pleaded, coaxed and argued with her handsome, impetuous son. He was inexorable.

"I must go away for a time, mother," he said. "Do you oppose me. A friend of mine, Harold Lexmore is going abroad for a few months. I have concluded to make the trip with him. I can easily catch him in London, for he intends to remain there a week."

His mother bade him good-bye that night with bitter tears. She clung to him, refusing to be comforted.

(To be continued.)

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WAS SHE TO BLAME?

—30—

(Continued from page 297.)

Margaret had risen, and slowly drew near to Hirst. Her face was turned from the others as she laid her shaking hands upon his shoulders, and when he looked up he was surprised at her ghastliness.

"Don't sing that again if you would spare me pain," she said, quickly; "it reminds me of my most unhappy days, only the air is different;" and partly to cover her emotion, partly to win her to forgetfulness of her wretched past, he broke into "Polly," which was a great favourite with Mr. Vandeleur.

"Now I wonder," thought Bertie, who had seen all the by-play, "what there was in that song to move her out of her usual sweet calm. I've seen her quite untouched by the loveliest, saddest music or poems; even 'The Prince's Progress' did not stir her, although I found it hard not to make a fool of myself over the heroine's sorrows."

Then she was called upon to take the place Hirst had just vacated, of which she was rather glad, not caring to see the impassioned glances he cast upon his "rare, pale Margaret!"

As the days passed the friendship between the two girls grew rather less than more, although Miss Ashwin did her best to win Bertie's affection.

Naturally the latter did not feel drawn to one who had robbed her so entirely of the man she loved, and Miss Priscilla was not slow to comment on Bertie's conduct in no measured terms, so that a coldness sprang up between Hirst and the girl.

It was very hard to bear, yet it seemed easier than his kindness would have been. It helped her to maintain her old pride, to jest and laugh as much as in former days, only her admirers murmured amongst themselves that "Miss Vandeleur was sometimes too sharp on a fellow, and had the lightest, cheeriest way of saying nasty things." Men began to feel uneasy with her, were never sure that she was not secretly ridiculing them; and wise matrons remarked among themselves that, in spite of her prettiness and her fortune, Bertie would die an old maid. Amongst all the men who flattered and hovered about her, Captain Grey was the most assiduous. His furlough had long ended, but his regiment had been quartered at the nearest garrison town, which was but five miles from the Robinettes, and rarely a day passed when he might not be seen riding up to the house, looking handsome and dashing enough, on his beautiful bay mare.

Mr. Vandeleur grew anxious, but his wife only smiled, and said he was "singeing his wings," that Bertie would never think seriously of him.

So May came, soft and bright, and all the world was dressed in tender green; the chestnuts were beginning to blossom in white and delicate pink, with here and there some dull red flowers; the hedgerows were showing tiny pale buds peeping out of their green sheaths, and the banks were bright with primroses, wild hyacinths, anemones, and late violets.

Captain Grey thought he had never seen the world so fair, and he swung down the narrow path by the stream in search of Bertie. He had recognised the growing coldness in Mr. Vandeleur's manner, so had stabled his horse in the village, and, resolving that day to put his fate to the test, set out to look for the lady of his choice. He was desperate, the increasing attention of his creditors made his position an unenviable one, and he sighed for the ease Bertie's fortune would command. "He did not love the girl, but he should be good and attentive to her," and as he thought thus he caught the flutter of her lilac dress. She was leaning upon some railings, looking down into the water, and the slim form, framed in masses of green, with myriads of blossoms at the tiny feet, seemed a very part of the Spring—so fresh and dainty was

it. The large white hat was discarded, and lay upon the grass; the soft breezes stirred the short curls about her face and ruffled the dark hair into a very pretty state of dishevelment.

His heart beat a little faster as he drew near. He would have been less than man not to have been stirred by her innocent prettiness, and something like pity for her should she say "Yes" to his wooing troubled his peace.

For a moment the careless soldier shuddered to think of that white life linked to his; remembered, too, a gentle girl he had left in a far-away town to mourn his loss.

But "needs must when the devil drives," and he lulled his conscience to rest and went on.

At the sound of his steps the girl turned her face towards him and smiled slowly and faintly, but did not attempt to move, and he took courage from what he fancied was timidity.

"I thought I should find you somewhere in the grounds. Pray don't alter your pose, it is perfection, and you look like spring yourself."

He laid one hand upon the two little ones crossed lightly on the rails, and Bertie knew what was coming. "I rode over to see you," he said. "Miss Vandeleur, I cannot go on in this way longer."

"What way!" with a lazy upward look. "Are you thinking of reforming!" with languid interest.

He coloured through his bronzed skin, but answered readily,—

"Yes, there is great need I should. Miss Vandeleur—Bertie, will you help me in my endeavours! I want to make myself worthy of you. I am a blunt fellow. I cannot say well what I wish, but I love you, and I want you to make me happy by giving me your hand."

She smiled in a strange way.

"Would my hand alone make you happy! If it came empty to you, what then!"

He was too far in the venture to retreat, so he said, apparently with pain,—

"Oh, will you not believe you are beloved for yourself, and yourself only! If you were poor and I rich it would be my happiness to play the kieg to your beggar-maid. Listen to me, my darling," trying to steal an arm about her. "Why should your cursed fortune come between us! I have dared to hope you were not indifferent to me!"

"There you were right," coolly; "for I hate and despise you; and even if by your flatteries you had won my heart I would not marry you, because the memory of one woman would rise like a ghost between us and destroy my chances of happiness," her voice quickened there. "Have you never cared to know what happened to Dolores Winthorpe after you bade her goodbye!"

He broke in hoarsely,—

"Who told you of—of her!"

"Myra Dinwiddy; and I have known that story from the first—how, in the selfish indulgence of a selfish passion, you sought her out and won her love, and then, because your needs must be supplied by a wife's dowry, you left her; left her to sorrow, the reproaches of friends, the contumely of enemies, to sickness, and as she paused he questioned, with an awful fear at his heart,—

"What has happened to Dolores!"

"Death!" she answered, tersely, and saw his face grown ashen and his jaw drop, heard his muttered words, "Good Heaven! I murdered her!" and for very pity bent her head upon her hands. When she looked up he was gone; and so ended the Captain's wooing.

(To be continued.)

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FACETIE.

PARTY AT THE DOOR: "Is the lady of the house in?" Cook: "I'm wan of thim, sor."

PROFESSOR IN PHYSIOLOGY CLASS: "Can you tell me which is the olfactory organ?" Student (unprepared): "No, sir." "Correct."

DE VERN: "I hear Miss Daahly does very good work with her pencil." Gladys: "Yes, her eye-brows are a work of art."

"I saw a man to-day who had no hands play the piano." "That's nothing! We've got a girl down in our flat who has no voice and who sings."

EDITOR: "Who was the first humorist?" Author: "I really don't remember." Editor: "I thought you might; you have been bringing us in his jokes."

MRS. DE WITHERS (on the way from church: "I think, my dear, Dr. Longwind's sermon was a very finished effort." Mr. De WITHERS: "It was, but do you know I was afraid it never would be."

MRS. GREENE: "Why, he's a wonder. He never deceives her in the slightest thing." Mrs. Gray: "No wonder they don't get along together any better than they do."

THE BEST CURE.—Mr. Henpeck: "Doctor, my wife tells me you have advised her to go to the seaside for two months." Physician: "Yes." Mr. Henpeck: "Do you think she needs rest?" Physician: "No; but you do."

MRS. HATSEED (reading from the medical almanac): "Portland cement and skimmed milk make an excellent paint." Mr. Hayseed (in the dairy business): "Paint! Git out. It makes cream."

DRUSILLA: "I did not see you at the Vanblunt reception last night, dear." Dorothy: "No; but I hoped to be able to go up to the last moment, but was prevented." Drusilla (sweetly): "Yes; I know the invitations were limited."

PROFESSOR GRUMP: "In view of these arguments I think you must agree that woman is not man's equal." Miss Strongmynde: "I do. She is not his equal; she— Professor Grump: "Ah! I thought I could convince you."

PAT: "Yer puttin the bye Diany early to wur-r-k." Mike: "Yis, it's himself is the clivric gossoon, for he's larnt ivrything the tacher knows." "He has!" "He has thot. The tacher sed, sed he: 'O! can't hammer anything more into thot head av his.'"

GOOD MINISTER (awaiting the appearance of the lady of the house): "What is that, my little dear?" Little Girl: "My apron. P's goin' to put it in the wash. Mamma got it all dirty." "She did!" "Yes, sir; she grabbed it up just now to dust off the Bible."

VINTON: "I am grieved to hear of your mistress's illness. Nothing serious—no great cause for alarm, I trust?" The New French Maid: "No, monsieur, nothing boeg, nothing grande. Something—what you call leetle, petite. What sey call se leetle—small—smallpox."

WATCHMAN (breathlessly): "The boys' dormitory is on fire, and if they find it out they'll stop to save their footballs, bats, and things, and perish." Boarding-School Principal (quickly): "Notify the boys that all who are not downstairs in two minutes won't get any pie."

"I want to speak to you about that dog you sold me," said the small man. "Well, he's all there, ain't he?" "Yes. But you told me he was a hunting dog." "Do you mean to contradict what I said?" "Not for the world, sir. Not for the world. But I will go so far as to say I didn't understand that his speciality was hunting a place to lie down and sleep in."

The Sultan looked up in alarm from the portfolio of war-sketches of his frontier correspondent. "Heavens!" he shrieked; "is it as bad as that?" His secretary hastened to reassure him. "That, sire," he said, "is a picture of a Greek soldier." The Sultan reached for a sherbet. "By the beard of the Prophet!" he gasped, "I thought by the skirt it was a New Woman in bicycle costume."

A MAN carried a pair of pantaloon back to his tailor, and said, "I cannot wear these pants. They are tighter than my skin." The tailor said, "I guess not. If you will prove that they are tighter than your skin, I will make you a new pair for nothing." The man replied: "I can sit down in my skin, but I cannot in those pantaloon."

An auctioneer in Edinburgh, named Hume, was one day selling some books, and not being much of a scholar, he made several ludicrous attempts to unravel the title of some French works. At last he came to a work with a rather intricate title, and a young swell, thinking to have a laugh at the auctioneer's expense, asked him to read the title again, as he did not quite understand it. "Oh," said Hume, "it's something about manners, and that's what neither you nor me has over muckle o' it."

A CERTAIN clergyman would always wear a M.A.'s hood over his surplice. Some of his confrères objected to his doing so, as he was only a B.A. of one of the universities, and had never taken his M.A. degree. One indignant and duly qualified person, says Vogue, went and remonstrated with Archbishop Magee, and begged him to interfere in the matter, "for," said he, "the man is simply wearing a lie." "Oh, no, not so bad as that," replied the archbishop, "only a false-hood!"

A COLLIER, whose bent is towards pigeon-flying, went to Bolton a short time ago, carrying with him a pigeon in a bag. He was asked by a policeman, when he was just about to toss up the pigeon, "What he had there?" "A pigeon," he replied. "I am just going to toss it up." "You must not toss it up here," said the policeman. "Why not?" asked the collier. "Because it is forbidden," said the policeman. "And I shall have to lock you up if you do." The collier, with the usual sharpness of his kind, thereupon took the pigeon out of the bag, placed it on the ground, stroked its wings, and said to it: "Aw cannot toss thee up 'ere, so-thou mun walk home. Dost 'ear! Thou mun walk home."

TEACHER: "Why don't you know your geography lesson to-day, Tommy?" "I didn't think it worth while learning it, ma'am, because my pa said last night that these troubles in Crete are likely to change the whole map of Europe, and I thought I'd just wait until the new map comes out."

The young man who prides himself on being original was talking to Miss Cayenne. "Your mother seemed very much amused at that little story I told her last night," he said, self-approvingly. "Yes," she replied. "Ever since I can remember mother has laughed whenever she heard that story."

A LADY took her four-year-old girl to a photographer. The child couldn't be made to sit still. He of the camera was as saucy as he could be, and worked every device of gentle persuasion to make the little wriggler keep still. Finally he said to the despairing mother: "Madam, if you leave the little dear alone with me a few minutes I think I can succeed." The mother had scarcely withdrawn when she was summoned back by the triumphant photographer, who exhibited a satisfactory negative. When they reached home the mother asked: "Nellie, what did the man say to you when I left you alone with him?" "He thaid," lisped Nellie, "thit thtill, you little rathcall, or I'll thake you."

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MRS. THOS. ADIE,

Soldiers' Home, Norwich, writes: "It is with grateful feelings that I add my testimony to the effects of your WIND PILLS. For years I was afflicted with severe pains in the body, arising from

WIND & INDIGESTION.

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SOCIETY.

THE daughters of the Princess of Wales are skilful as well as graceful handlers of the folla.

THE wedding of Prince Carl of Sweden and Princess Ingeborg of Denmark will probably take place in July.

PRINCE GEORGE WILLIAM OF CUMBERLAND is now in fairly good health, and it is hoped that he will eventually entirely recover, though he must always remain lame.

THE Empress of Austria collects cows. This is a curious habit on the part of her Imperial Majesty, but it is one which she faithfully pursues. At whatever place she stays she purchases a cow, which becomes part of her luggage when she returns home after her travels.

THE Queen-Regent of Spain has received a present from the Pope of a rosary composed of diamonds, rubies, and emeralds on a gold chain. The rosary was presented by the Nuncio at Madrid, together with a letter from the Pope commending the Queen for the courage she has shown during the trials of her country.

PRINCE CHARLES OF DENMARK will, during the month of August, be second in command on board the torpedo boat *Havhesten*, which will join the squadron told off for the summer naval manoeuvres. His uncle, Prince Waldemar of Denmark, who is a captain in the Danish navy, will be in command of the cruiser *Hekla*.

THE Queen has commissioned Mr. Orchardson to paint a Jubilee memorial picture representing four generations of the Royal Family—Her Majesty, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, and Prince Edward of York. When this picture is finished it will be hung in the corridor at Windsor Castle.

ON the occasion of the Queen of Denmark's eightieth birthday, September 7th, there will, according to the present arrangements, be an unusually large family gathering at Fredensborg Castle. It is expected that, as far as possible, all the members of the Royal Family will come to Denmark, both from the English, the Russian, the Greek, and other Courts.

ONE of the most curious customs in connection with the Court of Spain is the provision which is made for the safety of the Sovereign at night. The slumbers of the little King, and, indeed, the entire palace are watched throughout the night by a picked body of men, who are bound by tradition to be natives of the town of Espinosa, and to have served with honour in the Army. It is they who lock the palace gates, with much ceremony and solemnity, at midnight, and who open them again at seven o'clock in the morning.

THE Queen sets a wonderful example to her subjects of real hard work, not only concerning matters of State and family affairs, but her own personal education. To this day she takes lessons in Hindustani, a language she determined to learn many years ago. Her industrious example has been followed by the Empress Frederick of Germany, who studies music and painting with the zeal of a girl of seventeen. The Queen of Italy makes that of languages and literature her constant employment. The Empress of Austria is fond of Greek, and in former years joined with the Queen of the Belgians in a passion for breaking in young horses. The Princess of Wales and her sister, the Dowager Empress of Russia, are devoted to more feminine accomplishments. They spin, paint in water-colours, execute leather-work and beautiful art embroidery.

PRINCESS CHARLES OF DENMARK has already arranged to spend Christmas "at home." She is by no means cheerful in Copenhagen. Neither she nor her husband, although a more devoted young couple do not exist, would reside in the Danish capital if they could possibly help it. The trivial round of daily life in this quiet little city is naturally trying to a Princess who is essentially English to start with, and is furthermore of so lively a disposition as Princess Maud. When the London season closes, the Princess of Wales and Princess Victoria will return to Denmark with the young couple, whom in October we shall have back again in our midst until the New Year.

STATISTICS.

EIGHTY-ONE thousand passengers cross the English Channel every month.

A SINGLE oyster in one season will produce one million young oysters.

MORE cases of consumption appear among needlemakers and file-makers than any other class of labourers.

SPAIN has more sunshine than any other country in Europe. The yearly average in Spain is 3,000 hours; that of Italy, 2,800; Germany, 1,700; Great Britain, 1,400.

A NATURALIST of eminence makes the following calculations in regard to the work done by the honey-bee: When the weather is fine a worker can visit from 40 to 80 flowers in six or ten trips, and collect a grain of nectar. If it visits 200 and 400 flowers, it will gather 5gr. It would, therefore, take it several years to manufacture a pound of honey, which would fill about 8,000 cells.

GEMS.

THE greater the knowledge, the greater the doubt.

GOODNESS, whether successful or not, enriches its possessor.

COMPLIMENTS are said to cost nothing, yet many pay what they value most to secure them.

MANY complain of lack of memory, but few complain of lack of judgment; yet the last is the commoner lack of the two.

HE who has a love for nature can never be alone. In the shells he picks up on the shore, in the leaf fading at his feet, in the grain of sand and the morning dew, he sees enough to employ his mind for hours. Such a mind is never idle. He studies the works of nature which he sees all around him, and finds a pleasure of which the devotee of sin and folly can form no conception.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

APPLE TAPIOCA PUDDING.—Soak one cup of tapioca over night in four cups of water. Next morning add about six large tart apples, chopped very fine, and add one cup of sugar; bake slowly until done. To be eaten either warm or cold, with sugar.

HOTEL SAUCE.—Melt one ounce of butter in a small saucepan, stir in an even tablespoonful of flour, one gill of fish stock, one gill of cream or strained boiled milk; stir till well boiled, then add a good squeeze of lemon juice, white pepper and salt to taste, lastly stirring in a teaspoonful of chopped parsley.

GRILLED KIDNEYS.—Grill the kidneys in the usual manner, and serve upon toast which has been covered with potted ham. On the top of each kidney put a piece of piquant butter, made as follows: Mix together three parts of fresh butter, a little very finely chopped shallot, six capers, and one gherkin, also chopped; season with pepper, salt, and lemon juice, and a little chopped parsley.

IRISH FRUIT CAKE.—One pound granulated sugar, one pound sweet butter, ten eggs, one pound of browned flour, sifted with two teaspoonfuls of baking powder, one-half cupful of syrup, one-half cupful black molasses, five tablespoonfuls of rose water, ten tablespoonfuls fruit juice, three tablespoonfuls of cinnamon, one tablespoonful cloves, five teaspoonfuls of allspice, four teaspoonfuls nutmeg, one-half teaspoonful mace, four pounds chopped seeded raisins, four pounds currants, one pound finely-sliced citron, one-half pound of finely-sliced candied lemon, and one-half pound bitter almonds, blanched and pounded fine. Do not bake it too long, or it will become dry. When it does not taste of raw flour when tested with a broom straw, it will be done.

MISCELLANEOUS.

CHINESE male infants, when they are a month old, have their heads shaved. A banquet is usually a part of the ceremony.

IN Belgium a railway carriage has been fitted up as a hospital. It contains twenty-four beds with wire springs, and a complete outfit of medical and surgical appliances.

ONCE every year the Emperor of China, amid great pomp and ceremony, ploughs a furrow in order to dignify agriculture in the eyes of his people.

AT Plougastel, a small town in Brittany, all the weddings of the year are celebrated on one day. In February last thirty-four couples were married simultaneously.

THE Siamese believe that it requires seven days for the human soul to journey between earth and heaven, and therefore pray unceasingly for seven days after the death of a friend or relative.

WHAT is known as the raft spider is the largest of the British species. It receives its name from the fact that it constructs a raft of dry leaves and rubbish united by threads of silk, and thus pursues its prey on the water.

IN most Hindoo villages there is a sacred pipal tree, among the leaves of which the gods are said to sit. To emphasise the truth of his statement, a native will solemnly grasp one of the leaves of this tree, invoking the god as he does so.

THE Russians have a singular method of extorting disclosures from prisoners. In their food is mixed a drug which has the effect of rendering them delirious, and in this state they are watched and interrogated, when secrets are divulged.

A TRAIN always exerts greater strain on an iron bridge when going quickly than when going slowly. When a train goes over the bridge it causes a wave to travel along the structure, owing to the elasticity of the iron.

LOBSTERS can smell as well as animals that live upon the land. A piece of decayed meat suspended in the water in the locality where lobsters are abundant will soon be completely surrounded by a greedy, fighting crowd.

GERMANY has passed a wise law to guard against poisoning. All drugs intended for internal use must in that country be put up in round bottles, and those which are only used externally must be placed in hexagonal bottles.

A BURIED city like that of Pompeii is being excavated in Central America, at the foot of the volcano Agass. Pottery, fine glass ware, jewels, flint instruments, and human skeletons over six feet long have been taken out at depths of fourteen to eighteen feet.

ONE of the pikes which can be seen at the Imperial Aquarium, St. Petersburg, was born toward the end of the fifteenth century, and is now, therefore, about 400 years old. This extraordinary fact is rendered all the more probable when it is borne in mind that divers other fishes in the same aquarium are over 200 years old.

AN American inventor has just succeeded in completing the model of a submarine boat, which it is claimed, will travel under water at the rate of six miles a minute, or about 360 miles in an hour. His boat is constructed on a mechanical theory which, when made known, will astonish the world. It is to be kept a secret, however, until his patents are secured.

PAVEMENTS made of blocks of wood and filled in with gravel are thought to be the most durable and practical. In Paris, where they are extensively employed, they are dipped in creosote and laid in Portland cement mortar. They are in pyramid shape and are laid closely and the spaces filled in, leaving on either side, next to the stone curb, a space into which the gravel is firmly powdered until it is settled and solid. There are few pavements more agreeable to ride over than well-laid blocks and a gravel filling. Concrete is disliked by many for its extreme smoothness. In wet or slippery weather it is dangerous to men and beasts.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

C. K.—Submit the agreement to a solicitor.

ARTHUR.—A verbal gift of the property is of no legal force.

CARL.—A billion is a million millions; thirteen figures.

V. W.—Although not strictly legal, it is usually allowed.

FOX.—No, it is only another name for the same complaint.

STELL.—We know of no remedy that would not excoriate the skin.

E. C.—It is purely a matter of agreement between buyer and seller.

WEAK SIGHT.—Excessive coffee drinking, it is said, impairs the sight.

J. G.—A solicitor would be the proper person to make the necessary inquiries.

SCRIBE.—The *Times* newspaper was the first to adopt the steam printing press.

FRANK.—In the reading-room of the British Museum. Apply to the chief librarian.

QUERENT.—There is an office, but you might obtain the information at Somerset House.

K. G.—A stepfather is not responsible for stepchildren after the death of their mother.

FRIGHTENED.—The removal should be made without pain by any experienced specialist.

GRACE.—Milk rubbed over it "feeds and preserves the colours better than anything else."

CONSTANT READER.—He can be called upon by the local authority to erect a proper fence.

E. S.—Of the two counties you mention, Sussex is, we should say, much the more wooded.

PHIL.—The largest standing army is possessed by Russia, Germany and France come next.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—If the girl is under twenty-one, the parents can object to the marriage taking place.

LOYALTY.—There is no hindrance to your flying any kind of a flag in celebration of the Queen's Jubilee.

M. A. R.—You can take such steps as are necessary to enforce the judgment you obtained twelve months ago.

BAGGER.—Apply to a respectable dealer in antiquities and carvings, or you might advertise what you have for sale.

H. S.—You can make a will yourself by using the proper formalities; but we should advise you to employ a respectable solicitor.

LOUISA.—The eyes are injured by night work, and also by loss of sleep. One of the best remedies for weak eyes is plenty of sleep.

L. L.—Spirits of salts, slightly diluted with water, well mopped over uprights, flags, &c., then washed down with clean water.

A. J. C.—The marriage would not be legal, but after the lapse of time mentioned the woman could not be prosecuted for bigamy.

J. J.—The finest glass paper, used very lightly, will make it quite smooth; and, if necessary, use it after the second coat, also when quite dry.

H. M. S.—If the servant leaves without notice and without justification, she forfeits her claim to wages due, and is liable to a summons for damages.

H. M.—Lloyd's gives the gross tonnage of the great Atlantic steamers as: *Invincible*, 12,938; *Comet*, 12,950; *Georgia*, 10,077; *Tesltonie*, 9,941; *Majestic*, 9,966 tons.

OLD READER.—The banns must be asked in the parish of each party to the wedding; and one of the parties must reside in the parish in which the marriage takes place.

IN DOUBT.—If you are indifferent or love someone also you should say so frankly and firmly. Do not be persuaded into marriage.

M. D.—It would be safer to have your heart's action tested by a medical man before beginning. That is generally the weak point at your age.

CHARLIE.—We do not give business addresses in this department, but you can get the information desired at any shop where musical instruments are sold.

IN TROUBLE.—The only thing we can advise is that you should go to the place and make inquiries of the clergyman of the parish, who may possibly be able to help you.

INQUIRE.—Calcutta is far from healthy to European life, indeed, would be insupportable there but for holidays spent on the hills or occasional runs home; it is a luxurious place, not over cheap.

I. V.—A trustee should see that the property entrusted to him is made reasonably productive when safe investments can be made. If he suffers it to lie idle he can be charged with interest.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—You are not obliged to find a home for your son if he is able to get his own living; but if he becomes chargeable to the parish you may be called upon to contribute towards his support.

LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—You can clean dust and fly-blow from gold frames with a sponge dampened with warm spirits of wine, but this does not renew the gold; that is best accomplished with gold paint.

HOUSEWIFE.—Silver not in use needs cleaning only once a year. Dealers in silverware say that it can be kept bright during that time—kept from the air—better by paper than anything else. They wrap their silver in tissue paper, and put it away in paper boxes.

MATEL.—Melted one roll of cream cheese with a little milk. Shape in balls and serve on lettuce leaves with a French dressing made of four tablespoonfuls of oil, two tablespoonfuls of vinegar, one half teaspoonful of salt, and one-quarter teaspoonful of pepper.

RICHARD.—The old Pretender, James Francis Edward Stuart, Chevalier de St. George, was the son of James II. of Britain, and grandson to James VI. of Scotland; the Young Pretender, Charles Edward, was the son of the Old Pretender.

ETHEL.—Put a cupful of flour in a pot, add as much cold water as enables you to reduce the mass to thickness of paint, then add six or eight times the bulk of water, and set on the fire, stirring constantly till it boils; remove at once.

BETTA.—Sponge the stain with benzine, it is less likely to injure the delicate colour than any other thing; ordinary dyes, where the colour is not delicate, should be sponged first with soap and water, as that may possibly clean it; ammonia and water is stronger.

A MEMORY OF KILLARNEY.

Thine skies were wondrously blue that day,
And the lakes in the valley serenely slept;
And the travellers' hearts were blithe and gay,
Till they chanced upon some who wept;
The light shone dim in the chapel place,
And the old priest's face was saddened and gray,
For there before him, in all her grace,
The pride of the parish lay.

Never before had she been so still,
For everywhere, in her own sweet way,
She fitted and sang and laughed, until
Death chilled her heart one day.
The masses and prayers were solemn and low,
And the requiem chanted best solo on the air;
The spirit had gone to the spirits go,
And its casket was lying there.

Many the tears that were shed that day;
And the travellers' eyes were with sympathy dim,
As they heard the sorrowful old priest pray,
And followed the funeral hymn.
The lights were dim in the chapel place,
And the downcast faces were pensive and wan,
As they grieved for the child who such little space
The pleasures of earth had known.

And then they arose, and carried away
From the light of their eyes, and with blossomed tread,
They covered her narrow bed.
And close by the side of the lake so fair,
With uncurled tresses and lips unexpressed,
The pride of the parish sleeps so deep
That nothing can mar her rest.

V. R.—Hot fomentations with turpentine or laudanum by means of flannel are old-fashioned household remedies and are generally effective, as is in chronic cases the plan of counter-irritation by applying a heated iron to the affected part with a piece of brown paper interposed.

JANET.—The proper way is to cut off each end, after well washing of course. The peel is allowed to remain. From twenty to thirty minutes are sufficient to bake. They should then be served hot, and the flavour is much improved if they are left lengthwise and a piece of peel placed upon them.

REGULAR READER.—They are generally a matter of special agreement at the beginning. When there is no agreement the usual custom is for indoor servants to have a holiday once a month, and in some families they are allowed a few hours on Sunday afternoons or evenings; but that is a matter of favour.

YOUNG HOUSEKEEPER.—Never use water that is not perfectly fresh. Water that has been standing overnight in a bedroom, kitchen or any apartment should be thrown out, for floating germs have settled in it, and it is dangerous to breathe to make use of it. Tea and coffee should always be made with fresh water.

FLORENCE.—We think you should sponge it with ammonia; mix ammonia and water, perhaps at first double the water to the ammonia, and sponge it with that; try a bit first to see that it does not injure the colour; we think you should, if that does not succeed, try benzene.

IGNORANT.—Kindergarten is a word derived from the German, *Kind*, the plural form of *kind*, child, and *garten*, garden; the combination meaning "Children's garden." It is a school for young children, in which play or exercise is combined with study—special attention being paid to object teaching.

POLLY.—Smear it over with whitening, mixed to the consistency of common paste in warm water. Rub the surface to be cleaned briskly, and wash off with pure cold water. Grease spots will in this way be almost instantly removed, as well as other marks, and the paint will retain its brilliancy and beauty unimpaired.

E. C.—The Olympia games were celebrated at Olympia every fifth year. The period between two celebrations was called an Olympiad. People were drawn from all parts of Greece and many foreign countries to witness them, which consisted of horse and foot races, leaping, throwing the quoit, wrestling, boxing, fencing, &c.

ROBERT.—The King of Greece came into possession of the Crown by accepting it at the hands of the nation; it had been offered to various royal personages; the previous King got it in the same way; he was Otto of Bavaria, but a weak man and soon ran through his tenure.

NEP.—Moorchaum is a German word meaning sea foam; it is applied to a popular clay found principally in Moravia, the Crimea, Asiatic Turkey, and Spain, because that clay is often found in lumps on the sea shore, and looks not unlike solidified pieces of foam washed up by the tide; it is used as soap by the Moors in their baths.

DAISY.—The wallflower is a native of Southern Europe, but has been cultivated in Northern and Central Europe. It was introduced into England from Spain as wall gillflower, which became wall gillflower and wallflower. It was so called from growing in rocky places, and on old walls, to distinguish it from the common gillflower, which is now called stock gillflower.

N. S.—It derives its name from having first been performed in an oratory. Its origin is ascribed to St. Philip Neri, about 1550. The first oratorio in London was performed in Lincoln's Inn Theatre, in Portugal street, in 1732. Handel's oratorio of "Israel in Egypt" was produced in 1739, and "The Messiah" in 1741; Haydn's "Creation" in 1798.

H. A.—Dressing the scalp with pure paraffin oil, which can be "sweetened" with any perfume preferred, is by many found to be a good way to make hair grow; then a great actor succeeded with gin in which he had steeped a cut-up native (not Spanish) onion, making it into little squares, which he put into a pint bottle and filled up with the gin, letting it stand for twenty-four hours before using.

CURIOUS.—The Lydian stone, used for testing gold alloys, is a velvet-black quartz or plain Jasper. The metal when rubbed upon the stone leaves a portion upon the black surface; and this being touched with a drop of nitric acid indicates to the experienced eye the comparative purity of the alloy by the colour. Suitable pieces of quartz for this use were originally obtained in Lydia; whence the name. It is also called touchstone.

FARDA.—Get a large handful of bran and boil it with about a quart of water for half an hour; then strain it and mix it with cold water to make it tepid, and wash the place of work in that till it is clean; this will not injure the finest colour; then quickly rinse it in cold water; put a tablespoonful of vinegar in the water, and rinse it quickly; shake it well; fold, clap, and dry about half; then iron on wrong side, and after on right, but always with a bit of maulin over the work.

WORK-A-DAY.—To be self-supporting and in a position to defy, as far as any human being can, the vicissitudes of life is one of the most comforting situations in the world. Every person ought to have at his or her command some trade or profession by means of which a decent living could be earned. Just what to take up in the way of business is a question which every woman must to a certain extent decide according to her situation, means and her peculiar tastes and fitness.

A. W.—Young harks should be fed frequently, a little being given at a time, beginning before six in the morning; feed with soaked bread, mixed with crushed hempseed and a little scraped beef and egg; old birds may have breadcrumbs and crushed hempseed, with morsels of cheese or potato, and other table scraps; they will also take scraped beef and egg, gentian, and meal worms; let them have plenty of gravelly sand to bathe in; they do not use water for this in their wild state.

HURRY.—Take half a pound of potatoes—weighed after being boiled and passed through a potato masher, and used hot—half a pound of flour, five ounces of good dripping, one tablespoonful of baking powder, two ounces of currants, two ounces of sugar, and a pinch of salt. Rub the dripping into the flour, sprinkle in the baking powder and salt, stir in the potatoes lightly, then the currants and sugar. Then press all the ingredients into a stiff dough. Flour a pastry board, and put the mixture on it. Make the dough into about a dozen flat round cakes, flour again, and bake on a griddle till cooked.

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